

Between the Lines ON THE AMERICAN FRONT



A BOYS' STORY OF
THE GREAT WAR
FRANKLIN T. AMES

BETWEEN THE LINES ON THE AMERICAN FRONT

By FRANKLIN T. AMES

Author of

"Between the Lines in Belgium," Etc.

An up-to-date war story for boys, telling how several lads volunteered, how they were sent to a training camp, and how, later, they took the perilous trip to France and went to the fighting front.

This was at a time when a number of their intimate friends were in Germany and could not get home. How the brave soldier boys fought their way forward, how those in the land of the Huns tried to escape, and how at last the Americans were reunited, is told in a manner absorbing in the extreme.

CHS (157) A

Helan W. Hanna
120 Roland Ave

**BETWEEN THE LINES
[ON THE AMERICAN FRONT**

BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANKLIN T. AMES

BETWEEN THE LINES IN BELGIUM

BETWEEN THE LINES IN FRANCE

**BETWEEN THE LINES ON THE
AMERICAN FRONT**



*Under the impetuous Rush of the Yankee
fighters, the Germans were borne
backward*

Between the Lines On the American Front

*A Boy's Story of the Great
European War*

BY
FRANKLIN T. AMES

AUTHOR OF
BETWEEN THE LINES IN BELGIUM,
BETWEEN THE LINES IN FRANCE, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
EDWARD C. CASWELL



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PREFACE

DOUBTLESS those of my young readers who chance to possess the second volume of the Great War Series will remember a promise made in the last part of the story that, did time and opportunity permit, I would be pleased to once more follow the fortunes of Tom Maillard and the Dorr cousins, and attempt to describe further interesting happenings along the fighting front.

In pursuance of that promise I am now able to present the third volume, which I trust will receive as cordial a welcome from my many young American friends as those preceding it.

Naturally, since America entered the war after the other books were written, it seemed only right that the next story should deal with matters appealing even more closely to our hearts and imaginations than the heroic deeds of those making up the French and British armies in the field. In accordance with this idea I have endeavoured to give a coherent description of the experiences the vast majority of our boys passed through in their brief career as members of Uncle Sam's fighting forces.

The voluntary enlistment, or willing enrollment

Preface

through means of the selective draft; the passage to a training camp, with its hard work and lessons; the embarkation for overseas duty; the thrilling voyage through submarine-infested waters; the never-to-be-forgotten landing in France, where America was already starting those stupendous improvement works, destined to remain as an imperishable monument to her energy, and also her affection for the land of La Fayette; the further training, with foreign teachers to instruct them; the brigading of the troops with British and French seasoned veterans; and then finally that glorious opportunity to prove at Château Thierry and the St. Mihiel salient how Yankee soldiers were the peers of any class of fighters in the whole world, barring none — all these experiences which I have touched upon between these covers have recently become a part of the life history of countless enthusiastic young men who promptly answered our country's call to service.

It is my earnest hope that whoever reads this book will not only enjoy the narrative for the spirit of clean and healthy adventure pervading its pages, but that it may also serve as an inspiration to nobler purposes in life, as well as add to the spirit of patriotism that is, or should be, the proud heritage of every young American.

FRANKLIN T. AMES.

BETWEEN THE LINES ON THE
AMERICAN FRONT

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CHAPTER I

AMERICA'S FATEFUL DECISION

"**W**HAT a long time has passed since we managed to get back home safe and sound, after our exciting experiences in France and Belgium at the breaking out of the Great World War!"

"More than three years, when you figure it up, Tom."

"And just to think," observed the only girl of the party of four, "the pity of it all is, we've never been able to learn what happened to our friends; the Caslons and Bartletts, since we separated on that July day in Nineteen-fourteen!"

"A single letter did come from Mrs. Caslon some time after the war opened, you remember, Lucille," remarked her brother Tom, a stalwart young chap. "In it she said she and her twin boys, Paul and Henry, were being detained on one excuse or another at Budapest, and might even have to stay in Austria for the duration of hostilities."

"And I suppose something like that happened to

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Frank and Thomas Bartlett in Germany," Lucille continued, reflectively. "All this while they may have been kept in a detention camp, held under suspicion of being English."

"Well, things have reached the boiling point here at home, and it looks now as if Uncle Sam meant to step in and take a hand in holding up the mad dog that's running wild in the world. And, believe me, when that happens you'll see Tom Maillard in an officers' training camp as quick as he can get there."

"Don't speak for yourself alone, Tom," quickly added another of the manly looking young fellows; "both my cousin Mart here and myself settled that matter with our parents some time ago. They have given us permission to enlist if our country goes to war."

"You boys seem to forget about me," interrupted the buxom looking Lucille. "But just the same I haven't been idle. For some months I've been taking a course in order to fit myself for a position as a nurse; and if there's a vacancy I can fill later on I shall go abroad with a working Red Cross unit."

"Say, this begins to look like business," remarked the smaller of the Dorr cousins, Harvey by name. "Just to think that after the three years of terrific fighting that have passed since we returned, all of us are now set on going back!"

"That's only because such strange and fearful events have happened since we left there," Tom Maillard observed, gravely.

"And Germany by her submarine frightfulness has now forced America close to the breaking point," Martin Dorr asserted, also looking very serious.

"Every day the news points to the end of our staying out of the mix-up being at hand," Tom went on to say. "The papers are sure a declaration of war on Germany is about to be announced."

"What a thrill will sweep across the country when it does come!" Harvey ventured. "I wonder if the whole nation will stand back of the President and Congress?"

"You haven't sized up the temper of the American people, Harvey, if you doubt that!" cried Lucille, with flashing eyes. "They may take a little time to get fully aroused, but when they do reach that point their might will sound the end of Kaiserism and all ambitious dreams of German world power."

"Well," said Tom, reflectively, and with a shrug of his shoulders, "if ever I should have the good luck to drop in again at the port of Havre, I'm bound to settle one question that's been bothering me for more than three years."

"Meaning those French binoculars you bought in that city, when we had to stay there several days

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before embarking, and which you so carefully placed on that shelf in the room closet at the hotel — and hurried away without? ” his sister Lucille suggested.

“ What a fool I was,” admitted the frank Tom. “ But then we were so wild to go aboard, as the vessel seemed just ready to sail, that I never once remembered about them until we were at sea.”

“ But you wrote to the hotel proprietor after you got home, didn’t you, Tom? ” asked Mart.

“ As many as three different times. But never a single word did I get in reply,” confessed the other. “ Either my letters never reached him; or else somebody stole the binoculars, and the hotel man couldn’t be bothered sending me word. But I’ve never forgotten, and some day I hope to recover my property.”

“ I must say you’re a pretty sanguine sort of fellow, Tom,” Mart chuckled. “ Chances are ten to one you’ll never set eyes on those binoculars again. In war times things go astray a whole lot easier than when Peace rules the land. I wager you are doomed to disappointment.”

“ That may be, Mart,” snapped the other. “ But it won’t be because of lack of trying on my part, let me tell you. Talking about a wager, suppose we fix one up right now? ”

“ About your getting your precious binoculars back again, you mean? ” Mart demanded. “ All right, what are the conditions? ”

"If I manage to recover them you will set up a dinner for the crowd when we have the first chance for a good feed. And if I fail, why, the joke will be on me, likewise the dinner. Is it a go, Mart?"

"Consider that settled. Lucille and Harvey here can be witnesses to the fact. But, Tom, if by good luck we should happen to run across the Caslons and the Bartletts, I think they ought to be counted in that spread, too."

"I shall be only too glad to have them with us. But there are times when I fear the merry party that did London in such a hurry three years ago last July, and then separated to see Belgium, France, Germany and Austria, will never get together again."

Whether Tom's dismal prophecy came to be fulfilled, or better things were in store for the young people, as well as an account of the outcome of the boys' wager, must be left for future pages to disclose.

Meanwhile a few additional words with regard to Tom and his three lively companions may be timely just here, before launching them forth on the new series of adventurous happenings.

In the first story an account was given of how the party set out to see certain sections of Europe just at a time when there were rumblings of coming trouble in the air. But most people believed it was

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bound to pass by in much the same way other threatenings had been dissipated.

The Dorr cousins, together with Mart's parents, went to Belgium; while Tom and his sister, being eager to see the home of certain of their ancestors, headed for the North of France. Paul and Henry Caslon, the twins, had gone with their mother, a wealthy widow, to Austria; while the two Bartlett boys set out for the Rhine country.

So the sudden breaking out of the terrible war caught them between the lines of the hostile forces, so quickly mobilized. We have followed the interesting adventures that befell the Dorr boys in getting through Belgium amidst thrilling scenes that could never be forgotten, we have also in the second volume seen what happened to Tom and Lucille when the vast German army poured across the frontier of Belgium and, entering France, threatened Paris.

As has been mentioned in the conversation between the quartette, after they reached America in safety late that fall, their thoughts went out in the direction of the comrades, who apparently had been trapped more seriously in the war zone than had fallen to their own lot.

Every effort was made by relatives and friends of the Caslons and Bartletts to get some news concerning the missing ones, but with little result.

Up to this time, in the spring of 1917, only one

message had come out of the warring countries to those so anxiously awaiting word. This had been the letter from Mrs. Caslon, referred to by Tom. In this missive, censored by the Austrian military authorities, the widow stated that it seemed as though she and her sons might have to stay where they were indefinitely, since there was so much red tape to wrestle with that she felt almost in despair of ever getting away.

After that the fate of the missing ones became obscured in uncertainty. Although hoping for the best, their relatives were beginning to grow discouraged. Besides, there were many stories of cruel treatment, coming out of neutral sources, dealing with the terrible detention camps where all those suspected of friendly feelings for France or Great Britain or Italy were held as prisoners.

So it can be easily understood how Tom and the others were deeply concerned as to whether the absent friends would ever be seen again. And their hope of being fortunate enough to learn something more definite concerning the Caslons and Bartletts, if ever they crossed over again, can be readily understood.

Although none of them suspected it, wonderful events were just on the point of materializing at the very moment they exchanged opinions in this way, while laying such ambitious plans.

"Listen!" exclaimed Mart, suddenly. "There's

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a newsboy passing the house, and bawling out something at the top of his voice!"

"It must be an extra!" cried Tom, jumping to his feet and rushing to the nearest window in the Maillard home, where the conference had been taking place.

"Oh, I wonder if the great news has come at last, and America is in the war!" gasped Lucille, turning pale with excitement.

Tom had thrown up the window sash and was leaning out. The newsboy went on down the street shouting his thrilling news, the tenor of which, however, few people could understand, on account of his thick utterance. But Tom, turning from the window, faced his three companions and excitedly exclaimed:

"I managed to read the big type headlines on the extra, and war has been declared with Germany!"

CHAPTER II

ON THE WAY TO CAMP

“GOOD for Uncle Sam!” burst from Harvey Dorr, with all a boy’s enthusiasm, that takes small account of the horrors war brings in its train. “I’ve been afraid right along something would happen to make America take water from those Germans. But now it’s all right!”

It may as well be stated here and now that Harvey was usually inclined to be sceptical concerning the outcome of events; he was not “from Missouri,” to be sure, but had often to be convinced before he would believe. So among his companions he was known as a “doubter.”

“If that news is true,” said Tom, impressively, “then we’ve thrown our gauntlet into the ring. At last America has joined hands with gallant France and valiant Great Britain, as well as the awakened Italy, to clean up that hornets’ nest in Central Europe.”

“And we three mean to be in the fight! Just think of it, boys!” gushed Mart, with the sublime faith of young blood, seeing nothing, fearing nothing, and only knowing that deep down in his heart

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he felt stirring a strange emotion which was really the essence of patriotism.

"You've counted wrong, Mart," said a quiet voice, as Lucille laid her hand on the arm of the excited speaker.

"Excuse me, Lucille!" he hastily exclaimed, "I should have said *four*, after hearing you tell about training for Red Cross work overseas."

"That's right!" snapped Tom, with an admiring, as well as fond, glance toward his sister. "And it wouldn't surprise me a bit if she went across long before the chance came to us. I expect to spend four to six months in an officers' training camp, studying hard; and you fellows after you enlist will have as long a time in some cantonment, learning the ropes."

"I admire your grit, Lucille," said Mart, "though some people might say you're young for such hard service."

"Tom, how about it?" she appealed to her brother, with a winning smile.

"All nonsense, fellows," he instantly told them. "Why, if you'd been along with us two and a half years ago in France, and had seen how bravely this girl stood up under all sorts of trying situations, you'd know she has the nerve necessary to make a splendid Red Cross nurse."

"Well, I'm going to step out and see if I can get an extra," said Harvey, snatching up his cap.

"Let's all go," suggested Tom.

"Make it unanimous!" added Mart; and even Lucille joined them as they started forth.

Needless to say it was no false rumour. The President had appeared before Congress and declared that since Germany had settled on a policy of cruel and unwarranted and unlimited submarine warfare, destroying every vessel that could be looked upon as aiding her enemies, even to those of neutrals, war between the United States and the ambitious monarchy could already be considered as in effect.

That thrilling news was electrifying the entire nation on that spring day in 1917. From the Atlantic to the Pacific millions read the declaration, and most of them with fervent thanksgiving in their patriotic hearts.

They had waited long and feverishly for just those words that meant so much to the peoples of the Allies, struggling with the maddened monster of Europe, and now it had come at last!

Who can ever forget the days that followed, with their feverish excitement? The Great Republic had at last taken her place alongside the other democratic nations, to settle once and for all whether the voice of the common people or that of monarchs claiming to be Heaven-appointed should rule the earth.

True to their avowal the three boys lost no time

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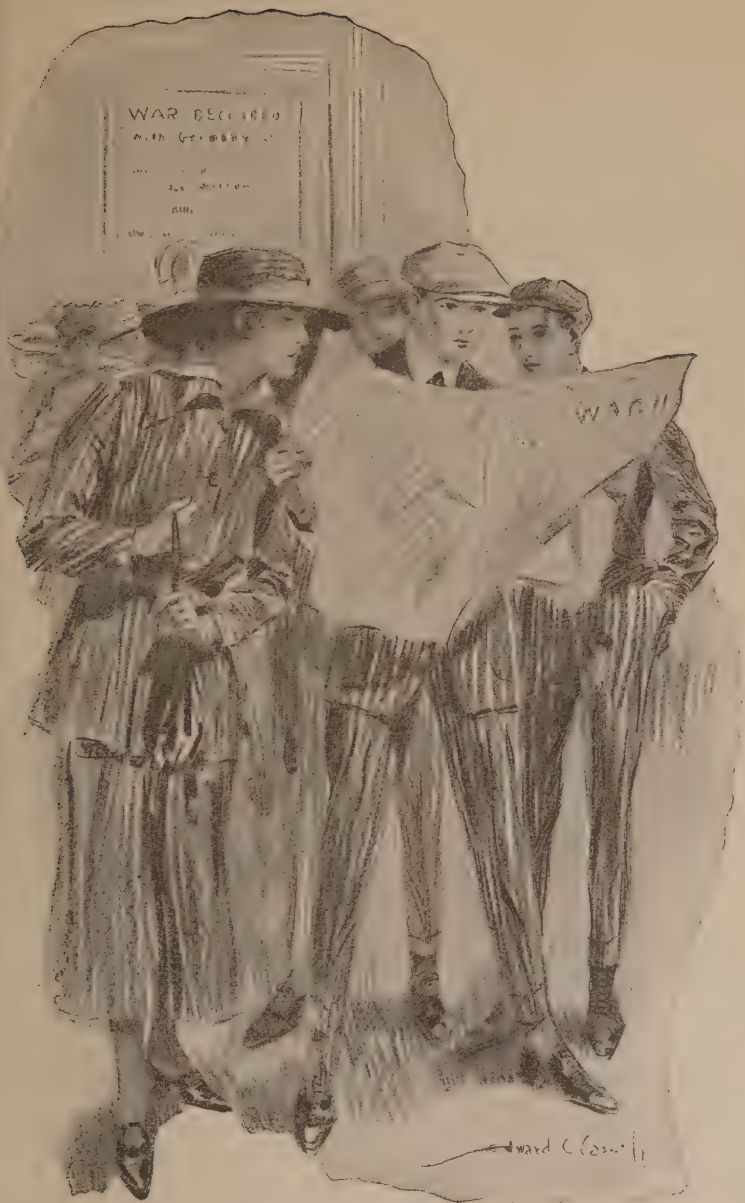
in starting operations looking to attaining their longed-for goal. Tom Maillard applied for entrance to one of the officers' training camps situated in the East, and to his immense delight met with no repulse.

He had hardly started for his new quarters when the Dorr boys found themselves accepted by the Government officials, after a rigid medical examination that disclosed no faults in their physical make-up. Of course they would not have been allowed to volunteer, both being still under age, without the unqualified approval of their parents or guardians.

It was a great day in the Dorr family when Mart and Harvey, who lived with his cousin, left home with their suit-cases and headed for the cantonment to which they had been ordered. There was an enormous crowd at the station to see the party off, relatives and friends of the score and more of volunteers thronging the platform and cheering frantically as the train finally pulled out.

Lucille was there, bravely waving her handkerchief and not shedding a tear. Well did she know that those valiant boys needed all the encouragement possible when thus starting forth to offer their services, possibly give their young lives in addition, upon those bloody battlefields of Europe, where vast armies were daily striving for the mastery.

"I expect to see you again before I leave for



The thrilling news was electrifying the entire nation

France," she had told Mart, between whom and herself there had always been a sort of boy and girl sweetheart affection, though it might possibly never amount to anything more than that.

"I hope you can get away from the hospital where you've taken up your finishing studies, and come up with our folks a month or two later to visit us," Mart had said in reply.

"And," added Harvey, proudly, thrusting out his chest as he thought a real soldier should, "long before then we'll have received our khaki uniforms, and feel as if we were really in Uncle Sam's service. When you're still wearing civilian clothes and lugging an old suit-case around it's hard to imagine you're in the army."

"The time will come," remarked an old sergeant in charge of the detachment, who chanced to be passing and heard the boy's natural remark, "when you'll have a heap of trouble, son, in believing that you were ever anything else than a soldier."

Since he was a Regular Army man, who had been with Pershing down in Mexico, and had also seen all sorts of exciting work out in the Philippines, he was looked upon with great respect by the novices and reckoned a sort of oracle. Harvey accordingly treasured up what the grizzly old sergeant had said, and needless to say found his prediction fulfilled before he had been wearing the khaki a full year.

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So the train pulled out at last, amidst great shouting and waving of hats and handkerchiefs. It was a scene occurring in dozens and scores of other places all over the wide land. In the days to come it would be repeated in tens of thousands of cases, when the selective draft should begin to gather in the willing young men of the country by millions.

The two boys sank back on their seat after they could no longer catch a last glimpse of the faces so dear to them. Both felt a cold sensation in the region of their hearts, since the die was now cast and there could be no turning back.

Mart, being the older, considered it a part of his duty to buoy up the supposed-to-be-sinking spirits of Harvey. His mother had entrusted this mission to his care, for Harvey having been adopted years before after all was her "baby," and she could never realize that he had now grown to be almost a man, and was fully capable of taking care of himself.

"Now look here, Mart!" Harvey cried, interrupting the other in the midst of his little consoling speech, "please don't make me out a sissy. I'm going to stand things just as well as you can. Why, remember that I'm getting on toward nineteen, and almost a man grown. You don't see a sign of a tear in my eyes, do you, no matter how bad I feel about leaving home?"

"For a fact there isn't, Harv," admitted the other, secretly delighted by this discovery, "and I'm not going to worry any more about you falling down. I can see the genuine Dorr grit in you. I ought to have known it; but mother made me promise to watch over you, because I'm the older, you see."

"Just look back, Mart," Harvey went on to say. "Did I ever show the white feather when we were dodging the Germans in Belgium, and looking on those terrible battles about the time King Albert's brave little army held up the invading Hun hosts?"

"Never once, did you!" admitted the other frankly, as he reached out and gripped his cousin's hand, to squeeze it firmly. "And from now on I'm bound to treat you as my full equal, Harv, able and willing to stand everything that a soldier has to bear. There'll be no whimpering from the Dorrs!"

"Well, I should say not!" exclaimed Harvey, proudly. "We come from a line of fighting ancestors, and no matter what happens we'll not disgrace those of our name."

"Nor the country we call our own, with the flag we love above all flags on earth," added Martin, solemnly.

The train went booming along, and soon many miles separated the boys from all the home ties.

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They expected that during the coming summer, before they were called on to go aboard a transport bound for the scene of war, they might be fortunate enough to get several furloughs, so as to visit the home folks. Harvey was already dreaming of how they would display the khaki uniforms of which they would feel so proud to the admiring gaze of former schoolmates and neighbours.

There were several of their friends on the train; young fellows who like themselves had yielded to the temptation to be among the first to volunteer for foreign service. This helped to make the time pass more pleasantly; for while bantering one another after the customary fashion of care-free boys, they were able to banish all poignant feelings of burning regret over the recent separation from all they held dear.

Finally it was announced that they were nearing their destination.

"Everybody get his traps together and be ready to skip out!" bawled the veteran sergeant in charge of the score and more of recruits.

Amidst considerable excitement, and vague speculation, as well, concerning the new experiences in store for them, Mart and his cousin eagerly peered from the car window. They were desirous of catching their first glimpse of the new camp where Uncle Sam was gathering his early detachments of fighting men, so as to prepare them in a multitude

of ways calculated to whip them into shape for service alongside those veterans who had been so long bearing the heat and burden of the day on bloody Flanders fields, and throughout devastated France.

CHAPTER III

SOLDIERS IN THE MAKING

IT was indeed a thrilling picture that suddenly burst upon the vision of those eager young recruits when the train turned a bend and they saw in the near distance the vast camp that was rapidly taking shape. It was hard to realize that but a short time before it had been merely a stretch of pasture land, devoid of a single building, and with but occasional patches of trees for shade.

No sooner had the Government actually decided that no time must be lost in starting operations looking to the training of a great army of young men taken from civil life, than the whole nation began to throb with feverish preparation.

Camp sites had already in most cases been selected by those in charge of that department of the War Service, and other preparations made ahead. A multitude of workers were sent on to begin erecting cook houses and such necessary shelters to start with. Later on more substantial barracks would be built, but at present the incoming flocks of recruits, dropping off almost every train, would be sheltered

in the regular khaki-coloured waterproof army tents. (See Note I.*)

"Why," said Harvey, in astonishment, "it looks like a monster bivouac already, with thousands of tents running along the streets that cross each other. I can see a whole host of men working, some in uniform, but many others just ordinary carpenters."

"I suppose they have to depend on outsiders for most of the skilled work," suggested Mart, sagely. "Though nearly any fellow who's handy with tools ought to be able to help out."

"Oh, they'll keep every one of us hustling to beat the band," another of the newly fledged soldiers hastened to remark. "I heard the old sarg say as much. Between our instructions at the hands of officers who have been on the other side, and know all about modern fighting, and this carpenter work on grub houses and such, you can depend on it we'll keep busy ten hours out of each day."

And they were.

Those who had been placed in charge of this newly formed camp were evidently indefatigable themselves, and quite determined there should be no shirking of work among the thousands who would soon be filling those long lines of seasoned tents.

Before twenty hours had elapsed after the two Dorr boys landed in their new quarters both of them had been impressed into service, and were driv-

* For Notes see end of volume.

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ing nails at a great rate. The building on which they were employed that first day they afterwards learned was to be one of the first "huts" to be devoted to the services of the Y. M. C. A. Since that time every one knows how vital a part these earnest and devoted workers have taken in the strenuous life of the trenches "over there" in France, and how much the comforts of those "canteens" had to do with softening the rigours of campaigning.

For some little time there was no regular drill instituted. A shortage of qualified instructors delayed this necessary part of the education of the green soldiers. So, for ten days in fact, Mart and his cousin simply worked with such tools as were placed in their hands; and by that time were able to call themselves expert carpenters, at least in building camp kitchens, and laying tent floors for service in rainy weather.

Then came the glorious day when they were given their new khaki uniforms. Without a moment's delay every young soldier got into his "regimentals," and commenced to strut around, begging his mates to tell him if the fit was all right.

With the arrival of the khaki uniforms their drilling began in earnest, and from that time on various portions of each and every day were devoted to certain necessary pursuits. It was no play, but business, and the non-commissioned officer sent over by the French Government to instruct the new sol-

diers kept them on the grill until he felt satisfied with the performance of each and every member of the working squad.

Among the many things which they were thus learning, nothing pleased Mart more than the bayonet practice on the dummies previously prepared. It was with the greatest enthusiasm that he would leap across the obstacles placed purposely in the way, just as though bounding over the enemy trenches, and savagely thrust his bayonet into the helpless uncomplaining padded figure.

In fact he showed such aptitude in this work that he won the praise of the grim French sergeant who coached them. More than once in urging some clumsy beginner to show more fire and enthusiasm in his work he would beg him to observe closely how Mart carried on; which of course made the boy feel a bit proud.

"But after all," he said later on to Harvey, as they were rubbing up their Springfield rifles, so as to satisfy the keen and critical eye of the commanding officer when he should make his customary inspection at parade time, "that proficiency comes from my having always been a pretty husky tackler on the gridiron. You see hurling yourself at the dummy in playing for a football tackle is pretty much like this game, only now I have a gun and a bayonet to thrust out with."

"I keep doing my level best," remarked the other

young recruit, "and seem to be improving every day, though I can never expect to equal your wonderful way of smashing the dummy. Say, I'm sorry for the poor Hun who gets in your way, Mart, after we start the real genuine business over there."

"By the way, Harv," the older Dorr boy remarked, "what were you and that big bully, Bill Hicksley, talking about so earnestly? He seemed peeved, as if you'd stepped on his toe, or something like that. I'd advise you to keep clear of him all you can; because he's disliked by nearly everybody in camp, except that August Breitman; and I never could bear *his* hang-dog looks."

"Oh, I want mighty little to do with Bill, or his German-American crony either, I tell you, Mart. Fact is, it was an accident, my stumbling over him, and I said I was sorry; but he chose to be ugly, and vowed I had done it purposely. He said he knew there was a scheme afoot to badger him, and that I must be one of the ringleaders."

"He's foolish to think so," observed Mart, as though annoyed. "But most of the more decent fellows have as little to do with him as they can. I hope he didn't go so far as to threaten you, Harv?"

"Just what he did do," admitted the other, and then quickly added: "But then that's not going to make me lose any sleep, Mart."

"Still it's a burning shame that such a rough fel-

low should be a disturbing factor in a camp. The worst of it is, he's in our mess, too, and so we have to rub elbows with him from time to time. I don't know what he could do to give you trouble, but it's astonishing how such minds can find ways to annoy those they dislike."

Harvey only laughed as though he did not mean to let such a possibility bother him. Although he occasionally grumbled a little, and was still given to doubting, his nature was nevertheless a sunny one, and troubles seldom clung to him for any great length of time.

Of course they had a multitude of other duties thrust upon them in the course of their education for military service along modern lines. The method of fighting followed by the rival armies across the sea was so vastly different from that in vogue during the Spanish-American War that all sorts of new and novel devices were employed in order that Uncle Sam's boys in khaki might give a good account of themselves.

Actual trenches were constructed, and occupied. Then the clumsy looking gas masks had to be put on many, many times when the signal came that there were signs of deadly vapour stealing over the lowlands, and seeking to envelope them with its fatal fumes. By degrees they became proficient in this necessary accomplishment, for since the use of gas had become universal along the fighting fronts

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no soldier dared take his life in his hand at any time by neglecting to have his mask along with him and ready for immediate use.

Long weeks passed before they were granted their first furlough, and could run down home to visit the folks. How proud both of them felt when they walked the streets of their native city clad in their uniforms of khaki, and wearing the wide-brimmed service campaign hat that has for some years been the most distinguishing mark of Uncle Sam's soldier boys.

Everybody was delighted to see them. On the street strangers would even stop Harvey to shake hands and cordially wish him the best of luck. All this naturally kept their spirits up to a high level; and they were by now also becoming accustomed to their new environment and life.

"Wonderful news, Mart!" shouted the younger boy one day, when they were winding up their brief stay at home and getting ready to return to the camp, this time with less heart-burning than before.

Mart had been reading a magazine, but he instantly dropped it when his cousin burst into the room, to spring to his feet and exclaim:

"Is it about Pershing, and has he really gone over?"

"You've guessed it," Harvey affirmed. "There's a big poster on the bulletin board down at the newspaper office, telling that Pershing has arrived on

the other side with the first contingent of our army, and has been received with wild enthusiasm by the people! Oh, don't I wish I was in that lucky bunch, though!"

"Our time will come before snow flies," Mart assured him. "We can complete our intensive training just as well in France as here. And, besides, now that the draft is starting up they'll need our places here in camp for the new levies of conscripts. What great joy it must give those people in England and over in Paris to see the lines of our fighting men, fresh from Mexico, with their tanned faces and sturdy figures, marching through their streets, the Stars and Stripes waving above them."

When Mart said that he was speaking only the truth. That glorious day would never be forgotten by the hard pressed peoples of the Allied Nations across the sea. They had of late been staggering under a serious handicap; for Russia was known to be out of the fight, and her vast armies in the process of demobilization, while the Rumanians, being now surrounded by enemies, would have to make a dictated peace with the Central Powers.

And now came that first force of soldiers from America, the vanguard of the unnumbered hosts soon to be on their way, bringing fresh hope and faith to those who were almost in despair. It was indeed news to thrill millions of anxious hearts all over the known world.

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"Well," said Harvey, when their own excitement had in a measure cooled down, "that marks the beginning of the end. The Kaiser's goose will soon be cooked, now that we've got started in the big game."

"Given time, there's no question about what will happen," Mart added, for he was more apt to consider things seriously than the impulsive Harvey, who often jumped to conclusions. "But before they admit defeat the Germans are bound to make one more tremendous push, try to knock out the French, who are said to have been bled white, and also crush the British army."

"They never can do it!" asserted Harvey, positively. "Those dandy fighters will keep holding on, just like so many bulldogs, until we get enough doughboys across, in spite of their old subs, to turn the tide of battle. And once we take hold in earnest, it's good-night to Kaiser Wilhelm and his scheming Potsdam crowd."

Soon afterwards they found themselves back in their old quarters again, and entering into all the duties of army life with fresh vim. That brief furlough had done both of them much good, and prepared them for the arduous work still remaining to be accomplished as the summer waxed and waned and the time of their embarkation for overseas came closer.

They engaged in mock battles across the rival

trenches; dug and burrowed like moles in completing their education in the work of tunnelling; took long hikes to toughen their muscles; endured privations so that they might realize what they were soon to meet with on the other side; sallied forth at night as patrols searching No Man's Land for stray enemy forces, who were to be taken prisoner, so that valuable information might be extracted from them by the official heads; practised with trench mortars and in throwing hand-grenades or bombs; engaged in frequent rifle practice to develop their skill as sharpshooters; and in this fashion continually added to their knowledge of the duties ahead of them when in active service at the front.

Then, in the middle of the summer, one day came a party of their relatives, travelling to camp to see them. It was while they were talking and laughing together that Lucille made a dramatic announcement by saying:

"A week from today I sail for France, where I hope to see you both when you come over later in the year. My hour has struck, and I **am** happy!"

CHAPTER IV

WHEN MARCHING ORDERS CAME

“CONGRATULATIONS, Lucille!” said Mart, though something seemed to be sticking in his throat at the thought of the sweet girl’s going across the submarine infested ocean, to take up the strenuous work assigned to all Red Cross workers, whether just back of the fighting lines, or in base hospitals far removed from bursting shells.

“And there is still more news to tell you —” began Mr. Dorr; but his wife “beat him to it,” as Harvey afterwards remarked, by exclaiming:

“We have heard from the Bartlett boys, who are still in Germany, held as enemy aliens! But there is no further word from the Caslons in Austria. Some of us fear the worst has happened to the poor things, and that we’ll never know what became of them.”

“Oh, you mustn’t allow yourself to lose hope, Mrs. Dorr,” remarked Lucille’s father, encouragingly. “Those Austrians are not nearly so savage in their treatment of prisoners as are the Prussians.”

“I don’t know that there’s much difference, my friend,” said Mr. Dorr, “if one half I’ve read about

their cruel treatment of the Italian and the Serbian people is to be believed. They're all monsters, according to my thinking, and I'd hang the whole lot higher than Haman, if I had my way about it."

"How is Tom getting along in the officers' training camp?" asked Mart, partly to end the discussion that threatened to grow heated, and also because he was genuinely interested.

"He says he is digging away furiously, and hopes to pass the examination in the early fall, with flying colours," explained Lucille.

"Wouldn't it be great luck," observed Harvey, "if Tom became a second lieutenant, and was appointed to serve in the same battalion we shall belong to when we leave here?"

"I should call that pretty much of a miracle," Mr. Maillard told him, "because there isn't one chance in a thousand it could happen."

"Still, miracles come along once in a while," continued the confident Harvey. "I often think something close to one struck me when I got my folks' consent to enlist, and another when I remember our saying so positively that nothing whatever could tempt us to go back again to that war-stricken country across seas; yet here we are on our way!"

After the departure of their relatives the two boys buckled down to the tasks set before them with more determination than ever to succeed and make themselves proficient. The noble example of Lu-

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cille in volunteering to go abroad and give her whole time and energies in the service of suffering humanity seemed to spur them both on to further ambition.

As their military education advanced they found themselves showing the utmost confidence in their ability to acquit themselves ably when in the trenches at last. And both of them, like every one else in camp, felt an unutterable longing for the great day to arrive when they would be ordered to prepare to start for the port of embarkation.

Fall had come.

Twice the boys received letters written by Lucille to the home folks, and enclosed to them. While these were guarded in language, so as to pass the French military censor, at the same time they breathed a spirit of satisfaction over having been given an opportunity to do something for humanity.

"She describes the exciting life over there at that Paris hospital in a way a novelist could hardly equal," Mart enthusiastically declared, after reading the second of these foreign letters.

"And what wonderfully pitiful things she is seeing every hour of the day," Harvey added, with a sigh, as though he could mentally picture some of those sights himself and feel for the poor wounded Tommies and *poilus* who had fallen under the furious attacks of the invaders.

One day Harvey greeted his cousin when the latter entered the barrack building they now occu-

pied, in company with a number of others, with an angry expression on his usually smiling face. He seemed to be working furiously on the barrel of his rifle, as though engaged in polishing it.

"Well, that Big Bill Hicksley has managed to get some of his mean work in on me after all," was the burden of Harvey's lament.

"Why, what's happened now?" demanded the other, unable to understand what Harvey's words signified.

The latter held up his gun, and it could be plainly seen that the weapon was in bad shape, having been treated to some hasty process of an acid sprinkling, the spots left promising to consume an hour or more of time in the removal.

"And inside of ten minutes we shall be summoned to report for inspection before Major Demorest, who's a stickler of a martinet," Harvey went on to say, looking both distressed and angry.

"Do you know how it happened?" his cousin asked him, as he took the rifle in his own hands, the better to examine it.

"Never happened at all, I tell you, but was done deliberately, so as to get me in hot water during inspection!" came in bitterness from the appalled Harvey, as he once more started to rub ferociously, though he succeeded in bettering conditions very little after a full minute's work.

"You found it that way after coming in from our

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last gas-mask drill, did you?" continued Mart. "It wasn't Big Bill, because he kept with us all the time; but he must have had that crony of his, August Breitman, do the actual work."

"I remember now that several times I saw Bill grinning at me like a monkey, and wondered what he had on his mind," Harvey went on to say. "Now I know. Just look at that gun, will you? I'll never be able to get it halfway cleaned up, and I'll be called down good and hard by the major, for excuses are never accepted in such a case. Why, they may even put me to shame before the whole battalion for apparent neglect like this. It's mean for a fellow calling himself one of Uncle Sam's soldiers to play such a trick!"

Mart did what he could to remedy the trouble, but nevertheless, just as poor Harvey had anticipated, the officer upon passing along the row of young soldiers suddenly took his gun from him, examined it, and then proceeded to denounce the unlucky owner in stinging language that cut the boy to the quick.

What added materially to Harvey's discomfiture was the fact that he could plainly detect the satisfied gleam of maliciousness in the watchful eyes of Big Bill Hicksley. That hurt even worse than the stern reprimand from the major who accompanied the French drill-master on the rounds.

Of course, Harvey let his companions in the com-

pany know what had really happened, and most of them sympathized with him, for they despised the big bully; though for that matter the latter was certainly a clever soldier after his way, the best marksman in the battalion, and likely to make a hard fighter when the time came for action.

Nothing, however, could be done to prove that he or his pal, August Breitman, had been guilty of the trick; and so Harvey was compelled to accept uncomplainingly his punishment, which consisted of an unusual number of nights on guard-mount duty.

After that he treated Big Bill with utter contempt and disdain, refusing to pay any attention to him. The latter having attained what he doubtless called his "revenge," did not bother Harvey again; at least weeks passed by, and the latter began to believe he would not have any more trouble with the camp bully.

Then came a letter from Tom. It contained electrifying news, for with genuine pride he announced that he had passed his examination successfully and had been recommended for a second lieutenant's commission!

"Bully for our Tom!" exclaimed Harvey, in delight, as his brother read the news aloud. "He's made his first goal, and is out for a touch-down in the scrimmage. But I wonder if we're going to be kept here all winter in this old camp. We've learned everything they've got on tap for us, I'm

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sure! I'm getting wild to start overseas and to finish training right in the trenches. The British have been doing great work lately, and we Americans must look to our laurels."

Just then a soldier came bounding into the barracks where they had their sleeping quarters, and burst out with a thrilling announcement.

"It's come at last, fellows! The order passed over the wire I was handling, and I got every word. This battalion is ordered to be in readiness to entrain and proceed to a certain port of embarkation inside of two days! Hurrah!"

CHAPTER V

THE SAILING OF THE TRANSPORT

LIKE wildfire the glorious news spread through the entire section of the enormous camp given over to the lucky battalion. A mighty roar arose as it circulated far and wide. Men in khaki could be seen dashing this way and that, waving their campaign hats as if mad, while their vocal cords became badly strained through hoarse cheering.

"Well, that doesn't look much like the boys were being forced to go across seas to fight, does it?" remarked Harvey Dorr, standing with his cousin and several others in the doorway of the building where they slept.

"If the gentleman who once made the unfortunate remark that according to his mind there was little difference between a conscript and a convict could stand here and use his eyes and ears," added the excited Mart, "he'd take back his words in a hurry."

"Why, there doesn't seem to be a single fellow but believes that news the greatest ever!" a young man observed, his face glowing with pride and true patriotism. "I've been counting the hours, and

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worrying myself half sick because it's been seven months since I enlisted, and I'm still on American soil, when my heart is over there in gallant France with my two brothers and Pershing's boys."

The news proved to be true, and before night came it was officially announced. Then came the more serious business of getting their belongings together and making sure that every man had the necessities, and carried no surplus baggage along with him.

Very busy times followed. There was an air of bustle all through that section of the camp. It was easy to distinguish one of the fortunate recruits by his grin; while other envious soldiers seemed to have long faces, as though they felt themselves badly used by being left behind.

The last inspection was made the afternoon before the party entrained for the port of embarkation. Those who were lacking in the slightest necessity called for by the strict rules had to procure them without delay at the Government depot, or elsewhere, while numbers saw with burning chagrin certain prized possessions, which they had fondly hoped to smuggle along with them, ruthlessly confiscated.

Mart and Harvey had succeeded in passing the acid test. They were lounging just outside the mess hall awaiting the bugle sound of "assembly" that would announce the evening meal, when they

would for the last time in that camp form in line and proceed to secure their rations.

"Just to think," Martin cried, with a ring of joy in his voice, "by this time tomorrow afternoon we shall be in the embarkation camp and waiting for the order to go aboard our transport!"

"I wonder how long we must stay there before sailing?" ventured Harvey.

"No telling," his cousin told him. "It may be only a couple of days; and then again a week may pass. The boat we're scheduled to go on may be still at sea, westward bound, though safe beyond the submarine zone."

"One thing sure," added the impatient Harvey, "they won't keep us there an hour longer than necessary; because others must be coming on, and the embarkation camp can only hold just so many, I understand. I wonder where it is located."

"I can only give a guess," Mart went on to say. "The chances are that we shall sail from New York harbour, as most of the transports do. There is Camp Merritt above Hoboken in Jersey that is being enlarged right along, and if my judgment turns out correct we'll fetch up there."

Just then Harvey gave a gasp.

"Oh, it's impossible! I surely must be dreaming! And yet how like!" his astonished cousin heard him mutter.

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"What is the matter, Harv?" Martin demanded, laying a hand on the other's khaki sleeve.

"Mart, look for yourself, and tell me if it can be really so!" continued the younger Dorr boy. "There," he went on, pointing, "see that trim looking lieutenant walking along our street and peering to the right and left as if he had lost somebody. Tell me, doesn't his figure make you think of some one?"

"Tom Maillard!" burst from Mart's lips involuntarily.

"Just what I was telling myself, Mart! But say, it seems hardly possible! Now he's going to turn his face this way and we can make sure. Oh, Mart, it's Tom, certainly it is! Tom! Tom Maillard, hello, there!"

The trim-looking young chap with the distinguishing marks of a second lieutenant on his shoulders immediately came toward them, his face beaming with sincere happiness. There were certain rigid rules supposed to be observed in the relations between enlisted men and an officer in the United States service; but for the moment these were apparently forgotten by Tom Maillard, since he squeezed a hand of each of his warm friends just as cordially as in times of old.

"Just got in, and reported to the commanding officer of the camp," he told them; "and my first thought was to look you boys up, for I knew your

battalion was quartered in this section. I was ordered to report here so as to start off tomorrow morning, headed overseas!"

At that Mart and his cousin looked immensely pleased.

"Then perhaps you're going on the same transport we're detailed to board?" suggested Harvey.

"Now wouldn't that be great," added Mart, immediately thinking of what he had once said about such a "miracle" being possible, though hardly probable.

Tom's eyes were twinkling, as though with suppressed news.

"I've been appointed to a certain regiment and company," he remarked, as if casually, and at the same time drawing out a slip of paper on which pencil marks could be seen. "Since you are so well posted here it might be you could tell me where I can find my battalion headquarters."

Harvey took the paper. One look he gave, and then gasped for breath.

"Mart, what do you think? That miracle Mr. Maillard mentioned has actually come about!" he cried.

"Then Tom is going to be in our battalion?" demanded the older boy, his face illumined with satisfaction.

"Better even than that," continued Harvey. "He's going to fill that vacancy brought about by

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the death of Lieutenant Fisher, so he'll be over us and in our own company."

Mart was much affected by the good news.

"I'd shake hands with you, Tom, sure I would," he was saying, "but I just happen to remember that intimacy between the enlisted men and officers is frowned down upon in the service. So take the will for the deed. But you must have done some tall wire-pulling to get this appointment?"

"I'm not saying one way or the other," Tom told them. "Perhaps there was a bit of persuasion used by my father; and then again it may have been just the Tom Maillard luck. But here I am, and I hope to find many chances for cozy chats from time to time, when critical eyes are not watching us. But I must be off now to report at battalion headquarters for duty."

He left two overjoyed boys behind. All the remainder of that evening Mart and Harvey would exchange looks as of congratulation over the wonderful thing that had happened.

There was more or less anxiety shown until the order to move out came on the following morning, an hour after breakfast. Amidst martial music and loud cheering, the lucky battalion left the camp where they had put in such arduous months of training in all the branches of modern warfare and marched to the waiting train.

All along the route, as the train proceeded on its

way, they received a royal welcome. Whistles tooted and bells rang whenever they passed through a town or village. Boys and girls, women and men thronged the sides of the railway; and whenever the train stopped they offered refreshments and "smokes" to those who would accept. It seemed as though the whole country was bent on honouring its young heroes as they started forth on their noble mission in the interests of suffering humanity.

Finally they landed in Camp Merritt, not far removed from the wide Hudson and just back of the famous Palisades. Here they were assigned temporary quarters. Before going aboard there would of course be another inspection of luggage, so that everything not absolutely required could be weeded out.

This was on a Friday, and Lieutenant Tom having discovered that in all probability they would embark on Monday, managed to send word to the home folks that if they wished to see the last of their boys it might be wise for them to come to the camp on Sunday; for after that there could be no telling what might happen.

So, as Sunday turned out to be a bright, cheery fall day, the Dorrs, Mr. Maillard, and several relatives of the Caslons and the Bartletts put in an appearance, to discover what the camp was like, imbibe some of the martial atmosphere, and of course see the last of the three boys.

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They spent a very pleasant day, and then came the parting, when those so dear to them would turn their backs on the camp and return to their homes, there to await news of the safe arrival of their boys across the submarine infested ocean.

It was not until Monday afternoon that the battalion left Camp Merritt and headed for the dock where they were to board their ship. All the luggage had been sent on ahead, and what a vast amount of it there seemed to be! Before evening set in they had gone aboard; nor does it matter just where their appointed vessel lay at a dock, whether in Hoboken, or across the North River.

When the crowded transport finally cut loose and proceeded down the harbour every fellow aboard crowded the rails to wave and send back answering cries as ferryboats passed, and hearty cheers, as well as whistles, greeted the departing soldiers. These modern Argonauts were starting forth, not like Jason in search of the Golden Fleece, but rather with the grim determination of those Crusaders of old, who went to Palestine to try to wrest the Holy City from the grasp of the Saracen unbelievers.

Then darkness fell as they drew near the sea, with the Highland Lights over to the southward. In the east the heavens were brightening, and presently a moon, still nearly full, thrust a smiling face above the level watery horizon. Mart and Harvey, standing with Tom near the bow, thought that

broad band of silvery light falling on the heaving surface of the restless sea came to them as a beacon of hope, beckoning them onward in the path of duty. (See Note 2.)

CHAPTER VI

IN THE DANGER ZONE

“**T**HIS makes eight days we’ve been afloat and heading into the east. Seems to me we must be in that closed zone by now. Fact is, the boys are beginning to get nervous. You can see whole lines of them watching the surface of the ocean all day long, just as if every shark’s dorsal-fin seen sticking up might be the periscope of a German submersible.”

Harvey was saying this to his cousin as they lounged in a favourite deck nook one day well on toward evening. So far they had had a fine voyage.

“Well,” Mart remarked in turn, “can you blame anybody for feeling a bit shaky about it? We are expecting some British destroyers to pick us up along about here, though so far they haven’t hove in sight. Still that smoke ahead may mean they’re coming.”

“I hope so,” Harvey continued, with a chuckle. “Once or twice I actually thought I saw the wake of a torpedo myself, heading direct for the old

boat. You know those Huns don't give the first warning these days, and often fire away without even showing above the surface."

"Yes, it may be all well enough to laugh over such things when you're safe in camp," admitted Mart, frankly, "but it's a different thing after you get aboard, and know you're going over water where helpless steamers have gone down with every one aboard, perhaps the small boats fired on by the pirates as the crew tried to escape."

"It's good to see Tom a little while each day, even if he has to stand on his dignity for appearance's sake," Harvey remarked. "I heard you mention that little wager you made with him, about his lost binoculars," he continued. "Tell me, Mart, does Tom still believe he can run across his missing property again, after all this time has passed?"

"He insists that he means to find those glasses if it lies in human power," the other explained, with a dubious shake of his head. "And both of us happen to know that Tom Maillard can be mighty set in his ways. But shucks! I'm just as certain as anything the expense of that jolly dinner is going to fall on Tom."

"I only hope the Caslons and Bartletts are on hand to enjoy the feed with us, that's all," warm-hearted Harvey observed, a little frown visible on his usually placid brow, as though his hopes and fears were struggling for supremacy.

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"About those cards each of us filled out before leaving Camp Merritt, announcing our safe arrival overseas, I suppose, Harvey, they are to be kept securely and only put in the mail when a cablegram announces that this boat is in her appointed harbour?" Mart went on, after a short pause.

"That's the way I understood it," replied the other. "It saves ten days' or two weeks' delay, you see."

"A good system I call it," Mart agreed.

So far there had arisen nothing of a very unpleasant nature to disturb the harmony of the voyage. Harvey, however, noticed that Big Bill Hicksley sometimes watched him again with that sneer on his face; and once he had mentioned this fact to his cousin. He took up the subject again as they sat watching the rising smoke on the horizon that everybody hoped foretold the coming of the guardian destroyers.

"Big Bill keeps on looking at me in that queer way, Mart," he said; "and somehow I begin to feel that he means to try another of his tricks. I haven't done anything to bother him; but even at that he may choose to be peeved just because I go out of my way to avoid him."

"I hope he doesn't bother you any," the other ventured. "Both of us must keep on the watch so as to prevent it. That Big Bill is a puzzle to me. He comes from the city slums, we know, and I think

he must have imbibed his ugly ways from the air he breathed there."

"Yes," added Harvey, "he's got a nasty habit of wanting to boss things, as if might meant right. But in spite of it all he's a clever soldier, and the boss marksman of the whole battalion. They'll make a sharpshooter of Bill, when we get to the front, or I'm mistaken."

It turned out that Harvey's fears were not groundless after all, for that very night, some time after supper, one of the boys came to the cousins as they sat again on deck, and, dropping down alongside, opened the conversation by saying:

"Seems that you're in for it again with Big Bill, Harvey."

"What do you mean by that, Gus?" demanded the one addressed.

"Oh, he's got it fixed for you, that's all," came the disquieting reply. "One of the boys chanced to hear him talking things over on the sly with that sneaky August Breitman, and of course listened for all he was worth. Then he came and spun the yarn to a lot of us. We talked matters over, and decided we'd lay a scheme to knock that precious pair of prank players good and hard. And they sent me here to tell you about it, so Harvey mightn't intentionally spoil our game, you see."

"What do they mean to do this time?" asked Mart

"And what scheme have you boys fixed up to spoil their fun?" added Harvey.

"It isn't easy to play a prank aboard a crowded transport, and get away with it," explained Gus Brown; "so the best they can do is what sailors call an old game. They mean to creep up when Harvey here is supposed to be sound asleep in his hammock, and cut the rope, so as to dump him out with a bang on the deck below."

"A mean trick, all right!" snapped Mart. "How will you beat them to it, Gus, if it's a fair question?"

"We've arranged to plant a heavy weight, a piece of machinery — or something like that — in Harvey's hammock, making it look as if he were asleep in it. I can arrange things so that when the one who cuts the rope does his job the weight will be apt to fall on his foot; or at any rate give him a fine scare. You leave it to us, boys."

Both Harvey and Mart were only too willing to do this. They would not have been human if they had failed to experience a thrill of satisfaction over the fact that the sympathies of all the other boys lay with them, and that Big Bill did not seem to have a friend save the submissive August.

So it came about that after taps had sounded and silence had fallen on the deck where all those hammocks were swung, a sudden terrific crash sounded. At the noise a hundred heads were thrust into view.

Some were sure they heard a scuffling sound, as of persons trying to get away, and others believed it was a deep groan that came to their ears. Of course considerable excitement followed, and much talking, when the fact was made known that some prank-loving recruit had tried to play one of his practical jokes, and been caught in his own trap.

Harvey managed to repair the damage done to his hammock, and slept in it quite peacefully during the remainder of that night.

When the dawn came, and some of the earliest risers reached the deck, they were thrilled to discover billows of black smoke on either side, and make out the dim, camouflaged destroyers that had taken the transport in charge.

Mart and Harvey exchanged significant nods when it was discovered that Big Bill Hicksley did not show up for breakfast that morning. He was reported as being "sick"; but during the day he came out, and walked the deck with brazen assurance, and a sneer on his face; though the boys could easily see that each step cost him excruciating pain.

"He's got the nerve, all right," Harvey told his cousin, with a touch of secret admiration in his voice. "Bill may be a bully, and his mean traits stick out like the quills on a porcupine, but he's not the least bit of a coward. He's just strutting up and down there to show he doesn't care a snap of a finger for us."

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"I can see him wince every time he puts his left foot down," continued Mart; "but he means to keep going if it kills him. Oh, yes, Big Bill has plenty of grit, and might have been a decent fellow if he'd been brought up under different surroundings."

"Well, I suppose he'll have it in for me again because of this," ventured Harvey.

"Perhaps it may be pounded into that thick head of his that it doesn't pay to take hold of a buzz-saw," chuckled Mart. "He knows by this time how unpopular he's making himself, and that may bring him to his senses. But we'll keep an eye on Bill, and if he tries to get too funny again, another lesson is in store for him. This thing has got to stop!"

The day wore on.

They knew nothing about the location of the vessel, save that they were undoubtedly coming near the end of their long voyage. The presence of the two grim fighting craft, one off either bow, was significant in itself, for it denoted that they were now passing through the restricted zone, in which the sneaking German undersea boats lurked, waiting for their prey.

All through that day anxious looks were continually cast upon the heaving surface of the ocean by hundreds of boys in khaki, as they leaned over the rail.

Many times a thrill would pass through the entire

battalion when a significant object was discovered thrust from the water. Of course this always turned out to be a shark's fin; but it never failed to cause consternation, and give the travellers a fresh shock.

So the afternoon came, and the skies clouded over, while a sea mist almost blotted out the attending guardian destroyers, now moving closer, so as to keep their never ceasing vigil.

Soon night began to fall. It was currently reported that one more day ought to see them in port, providing all went well. That was where the rub came in; would they get through without a meeting with one of those terrible Hun undersea boats?

It was about four bells, and growing dusk when without the least warning loud shouts rang out, constantly increasing in volume.

"A torpedo is heading straight this way!" could be heard above the clamour of many tongues.

There was a wild rush to the port side of the boat, in which every one seemed bound to take part. Ten deep the soldiers lined up, every eye glued to the heaving waters. Extended fingers were pointing, and guided by these it was easy to see what had caused this amazing alarm.

The water was boiling and agitated just as they understood must be the case when a Whitehead or other torpedo is rushing through the sea near the

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surface, aimed for a target by those who have discharged it. Both Mart and Harvey held their breath, for apparently they were exactly in the track of the oncoming projectile, which, they thought, must strike near the bow!

CHAPTER VII

THE ATTACK OF THE U-BOAT

“GET your life-preservers, everybody!”
“Hurry! Hurry! Put them on!”

“It’s going to knock a hole in our bow, all right!”

“Don’t believe it’s a torpedo at all!”

These and many like exclamations could be heard all around the spot where Mart and Harvey clung to the rail, unable to tear their gaze away from that “spearhead” of agitated water rushing toward them with furious haste, and leaving a wake of bubbles behind as it progressed straight ahead with no sign of slackening.

But preparations for just such an emergency had been made, and at the first alarm the officer on the bridge had sent his signals to those in charge of the ship’s machinery, so that there came a sudden reversal of the churning screws.

There was a short period of tremendous anxiety, when no one could say with a degree of certainty that the onrushing torpedo would strike the imperilled vessel, or the efforts on the part of the engineer and those at the wheel would save them from such a dire calamity.

"She's holding up!" one wearer of the khaki shrieked in his excitement.

"It's going to be a close shave, believe me!" remarked another, in a cool voice; and Mart, looking up, was surprised to discover that the speaker was no other than the despised bully, and former dweller in the slums, Big Bill Hicksley.

He showed not the least sign of alarm; whereas his crony, August Breitman, clutched the rail and stared at the oncoming extending twin lines of bubbles with an expression of absolute horror on his white face, as though his heart had temporarily stopped beating.

And Mart remembered how Harvey, on seeing the other strutting about the deck, just as though each step was not giving him excruciating pain, had declared that in spite of his bad traits Big Bill at least was no coward. He proved that assertion then and there by his way of glaring indignantly at Breitman, as though sorely tempted to give him a good kick because of his showing the white feather.

As one of the eager watchers had said, it proved to be a "close shave." That terrible unseen object speeding through the water, and leaving a wake of bubbles in its train, passed within twenty feet of their bow. Only for the energetic work of those in charge of the transport, an ocean tragedy must have resulted, and the news drifted back to America.

that the ruthless master of a German submarine had taken deadly toll of Uncle Sam's boys in khaki.

But that was not the end, far from it.

The information that an enemy craft had managed to get close to the vessel which they had under convoy had been flashed to the destroyers, and they could both be seen coming furiously up, ready to take a hand in the affair, after the aggressive manner of their kind.

A new interest now began to attach itself to the affair, and again all sorts of ejaculations could be heard rising from those serried rows of spectators lining one side of the steamship, so that she had a perceptible "list" to port.

"There! didn't you see the periscope then?" one recruit shrieked, given over entirely to the wild excitement of the occasion.

"If only those fellows on the nearest destroyer could glimpse the same it'd be good-night to Mister Sub!" whooped another.

"Whoo! they're firing right now," a third chimed in, as a sudden boom was heard, and they could see the flash accompanying the discharge.

From both destroyers there came the flare of searchlights, and this glow was sent speeding back and forth over the surface of the sea, in the endeavour to pick up some trace of the audacious enemy craft that had stolen in between them and

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their precious charge, and come near to sinking the heavily laden transport with the first torpedo.

It was very exciting while it lasted, and many of the young soldiers felt more than repaid for all those hours of scanning the sea in search of a telltale periscope, though without any luck up to now.

The firing continued as though sharp eyes aboard the destroyers had made a discovery, and those in charge of the quick-firing guns meant to get in their work while the hunting was good.

"There, look! Isn't that a periscope over yonder?" cried Harvey suddenly, as he pointed out the object that had caught his attention; and Mart had hardly time to take a quick look before a shell from one of the destroyers burst exactly at the point under observation.

"They got the Hun that time!" cried the agitated Harvey; and as others thought the same way a mighty cheer broke forth that must have been very pleasing to those labouring gunners aboard the British "bulldogs of the sea."

The transport lay still, while the destroyers circled around and sought for signs that would tell the fate of the undersea boat. (See Note 3.)

"Looks to me as if there was a lot of oil floating on the surface of the water, all right!" suggested Gus Brown, the lad who had brought Harvey the information that allowed such a reversal in the outcome of Big Bill's latest "prank."

"There is *that!*" Harvey went on record as saying. "And I take it that must mean the pirate craft was scotched by that last shell, perhaps sunk."

Louder grew the cheers until few had enough breath left to continue the mad shouting. But apparently those in command of the destroyers did not mean to incur any fresh risk; for a signal was soon given to start the transport on again.

If the U-boat had met its fate, then every member of its ill-fated crew must have gone down with it, since no sign of a survivor did any of the on-lookers discover. Even though it escaped, it had been baffled in its intended design of destroying the transport; and that, after all, was the principal thing in which those aboard were most interested.

There was not a great amount of sleep for the passengers of the United States transport on that particular night. Another enemy craft might be lying in wait somewhere further along, and possibly this time fortune would not be so kind to them as on the former occasion.

Every sound heard during the hours that passed which could by a stretch of the imagination be made to assume the hissing of a torpedo as it tore through the water, caused many heads to bob up, while the owners gripped both sides of their hammocks convulsively, and held their breath, awaiting the fearful impact.

But it never came, and once more dawn found them plying their course peacefully, with their haven only a few hundred miles away at the most.

The sun came out and dissipated the sea mists, for which favour every one of the hundreds aboard felt grateful. It was much more cheerful looking across the water with a clear atmosphere; the fog was depressing, because giving the impression of something secret lurking in hiding, waiting to spring out upon them.

"Today will end it all, Tom seemed to believe," Mart was telling Harvey that afternoon. "We have already reached the English Channel, he says, and must be making for Havre as our port."

"I suppose Tom chuckled when he mentioned that to you," observed Harvey. "That is the very place he has wanted to see again; it was there he lost his prized binoculars."

"But if, on the other hand, it should be Boulogne or some other French harbour that we fetch up in, for all of Tom's guessing, that wager will have to wait for a settlement. I myself have an idea we're a whole lot further south than the English Channel; and that this may be the Bay of Biscay we're passing over right now."

"Well, little I care where we bring up," said Harvey, "so long as we set foot ashore again. I'm tired of this rolling motion that comes of overloading a vessel. The boys are packed aboard here like

sardines in a tin; and besides, think of the tons on tons of luggage stowed away in the hold!"

"I'll be about as glad as you to step on solid land again," Mart confessed, confidentially. "Fact of the matter is, I fear I'm not cut out for a sailor. If we'd met with a severe storm I think I'd have been deathly sick. But no matter where we hit the coast of France, everybody seems of the same opinion, which is that our voyage is nearly over, and that by tomorrow morning we may get ashore."

That was a thought affording universal satisfaction. Every one of the hundreds aboard longed to feel firm land under his feet again. Few of the boys were "sea dogs"; and the intense strain put upon them by the constant presence of deadly peril had contributed not a little to unsettling their nervous systems.

All through the day they steamed on. When the afternoon waned, and the news went around that land was in sight ahead, great was the rejoicing. So deeply interested were they in reaching harbour safely that even with the coming of night they could not seek their hammocks.

For once the rigid rule of "taps" was allowed to pass unheeded. It was a crowning event in the lives of those men, and the superior officers understood what a bitter disappointment it would be if they were not allowed to remain by the rail, and discover the misty shores of France at last.

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Along about midnight they anchored in the harbour, intending to come up to their dock with the morning. At last they could feel that they were no longer in peril of a submarine rover's torpedoes.

Standing on one side of the transport, Mart and Tom and Harvey listened, entranced by the strange sounds that came from the shore, where all those electric lights were elevated on high poles, and a beehive of active workers seemed to be as busy as could be. It was still cloudy and very hazy.

"Listen to the pounding of that electric riveting machine, will you, fellows?" observed Harvey. "It sounds just like a giant woodpecker tapping on the dead trunk of a tall tree in the forest. And there are a dozen working at once. I think the Americans must be rebuilding the whole waterfront of this old French seaport."

"And that puffing sound we hear, it must come from a regular big Yankee locomotive, drawing an immense load of dirt cars along," Mart suggested in turn.

"Somehow or other," observed a third soldier, a stripling who had been suffering during the voyage from home-sickness, for they had often noticed him sitting by himself, and always with a sad, far-away look on his face, "it seems to me as if we might have turned around, and were now going into an American port."

"Does sound familiar, for a fact," Harvey admitted. "There, I certainly heard a boss shout out something pretty strong, as if he might be roiled over a blunder of his men, and it was in real United States language, too."

"They say," Mart went on, "there have been thousands of husky negro stevedores brought over to France to do the work of unloading the steamships as they arrive."

"Listen!" cried a Southern boyish recruit, eagerly, "unless I'm a whole lot mistaken that chanting we can hear is by some of our Dixie darkies."

They remained by the rail, hundreds of them, drinking in the sounds and comparing notes upon the strange situation. Likely enough this invasion of a friendly country by hosts of bustling workers would always remain one of the marvels of this world war.

Sensations of national pride mingled with awe filled many a heart as the magnitude of the undertaking was talked over. America was undoubtedly building a monument there that would never come down. At the same time she was planting in the hearts of the French people an affection so abiding that time could never efface it. (See Note 4.)

"Uncle Sam has got a mighty long arm, it strikes me," Harvey said, between yawns, for he was now

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growing very sleepy. "Just think of his being able to reach across three thousand miles of water and attempt this enormous task."

"I'm taking off my hat to him, more than ever before in my life," affirmed Mart.

"Same here!" observed a number of the boys in khaki, crowding close up.

But by this time they were beginning to slip away to seek the first sleep free from anxiety that had come to them from the day of their embarkation.

CHAPTER VIII

IN FRANCE AT LAST

THOSE young soldiers from across the sea began to throng the deck with the coming of dawn, eager to set eyes on the shores of France. They had been reading and hearing so much concerning the gallant country of La Fayette, especially with relation to the thrilling deeds of her valiant armies, that for them France was the one land in all the world they most desired to set foot on.

While the debarkation might not be quite as expeditious as later on became the settled rule, when things were in better working order, at the same time there was little delay. The great need of ships to carry over America's coming millions of fighting men would have made such negligence something bordering on a crime.

Shortly after noon they were taken to a dock, and the unloading began. It was no serious undertaking so far as the men themselves went; but that seemed only a beginning. Down in the hold all their camp equipage lay, as well as the stores necessary to their subsistence. Then there were the horses and guns and caissons and motor trucks.

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The list of army supplies aboard that one vessel was almost staggering.

For hours it was a lively scene indeed. Some of the boys were selected to assist, whenever the need arose, and by slow degrees the piles accumulated on the dock until finally a move was made to start them off in the direction of the temporary camp which they were to occupy for some days, or possibly a week.

"Fall in!" came the order that electrified the waiting troops, and it was so welcome that they sprang eagerly to obey.

Winding in and out through the streets of that old French seaport, they received a royal welcome. Throngs were in evidence everywhere, men, women and children, principally the latter. Most of the men were in uniform, and it was now easy for the newcomers to pick out Canadians, Australians, English, Scotch Highlanders, French poilus, dark faced Algerians, and not a few wearing the well known campaign hats of United States fighters.

Their progress to the outskirts of the city was one vast ovation. Everybody seemed delighted to see them, and made the fact known by extravagant measures. More than once some excited old Frenchman darted forward and actually succeeded in planting a resounding kiss on the cheek of an unsuspecting Yankee soldier, amidst a roar of cheers from the blushing recipient's companions.

Finally they arrived at their destination, where they found things in readiness for their temporary occupancy, the tents being a permanent feature of the rest camp. There remained just an hour of daylight, and it required every minute of the time to accomplish what was necessary before they could expect their first meal.

Nevertheless it was a happy crowd that explored their new surroundings, and discovered many a message left behind by some of those who had occupied that camp before them, but who had now gone forward, it might be to a place appointed for further training before Pershing could use them.

A great surprise awaited Mart when he received word that he was no longer just plain Corporal Dorr, but might wear the chevrons of a sergeant. His cousin Harvey really seemed to be more gratified than Mart himself over his advancement.

"I always knew you had it in you to work up, Mart," he cried, as he patted his comrade affectionately on the back. "But it's only what you deserve! Not a single fellow in our whole battalion will begrudge you the honour, unless it may be that Big Bill, or his sneaking crony, August Breitman."

"I think Big Bill is in for the same advancement," remarked the other; "for say what we will, the fellow is a soldier to his finger-tips, in spite of his ugly ways. But here's our Tom coming, perhaps

to tell me he's heard of my great good luck, and wanting to congratulate me."

That was just what the young second lieutenant had in mind; and as if he did not care who saw him unbending to shake hands heartily with an enlisted man, he told Mart how glad it made him to see his old friend making his way up the ladder.

"If you care to study," Tom went on to say, earnestly, "there's always an opportunity for you to reach out after a commission. Many a smart fellow is going to come up from the ranks before three months go by; and why not Mart Dorr? You've got the right stuff in you, for one thing. And, Harvey, don't forget I'm including you in the list when I say that."

"Oh, the Dorrs are all bright enough," remarked Harvey, with a broad grin; "but I'm afraid I lack the ambition needed to push up along those lines. One sergeant in the family at a time ought to be enough. We don't want to be greedy, and carry off all the honours, you see, Lieutenant."

"By the way," added Tom, "I've got leave of absence, and shall be gone several days."

At that Mart began to chuckle.

"I'd like to warrant I could say where you'll be sure to fetch up, for one place, Tom," he suggested.

"The seaport of Havre!" snapped Harvey, apparently guessing what was in his cousin's mind, "to interview the *maitre de hotel* and find out what be-

came of the binoculars you left behind two-and-a-half years ago."

Tom laughed as if amused.

"What a remarkable guesser you are, Harvey," he went on to say.

"All the same I hit the bull's-eye, as you'll have to admit," asserted the other, positively.

"Well, that is one thing I had in mind, of course," said Tom. "You both know what a lot of bother I've taken thinking of that lost property; and somehow my nature is such that when a thing, no matter how small, gets to worrying me it grows like a mountain. I'll sleep easier when I've found those binoculars."

"Then you'll have to make up your mind to a long siege of restless sleep," Mart told him, firmly, "because I'm still of the same mind, and don't believe you've got one chance in ten of ever laying a hand again on the precious things."

"I hope you're saving enough out of your pay to settle the bill for that feed we're expecting to sit down to later on," Tom hinted, maliciously.

"Oh, that will be all right, if it ever hits me," Mart assured him, apparently quite easy in his mind. "But you have several days' leave, you said, Tom; of course you mean to run over and see what Paris looks like after over three years of war?"

"I'm going there, just as you say, Mart, but there's something a whole lot more important draw-

ing me than just to satisfy my curiosity. Lucille is working in a base hospital in the French capital, you must remember."

"Huh, as if *he* didn't know that!" muttered Harvey, shrugging his shoulders in a suggestive way, which, with his words, caused poor Mart to turn fiery red.

"Give her my best regards, Tom," the latter managed to say, without deigning to cast even a reproving glance toward his teasing cousin. "I'd like to go along with you, but of course that's out of the question. There's a great lot of hard work here for everybody; and I guess a sergeant will be apt to have his hands full."

"Hope you have a bully time on your leave, Lieutenant," said Harvey, as Tom turned away. "And although it would be hard on my cousin here if you succeeded in finding those binoculars, here's wishing that you may."

Tom shook hands again with both his old chums, and walked away with the springy step so characteristic of army officers everywhere. The other boys looked after him approvingly.

"He's a splendid chap, isn't he, Mart?" said Harvey.

"Never a better," came the prompt answer. "Tom Maillard is in my opinion one of the broadest-minded, cleanest, all-round fellows I've ever run across. When Uncle Sam made him one of his

commissioned officers he did himself proud. And depend on it, Tom will never disgrace his uniform when the fighting grows hot and furious, for he's true-blue, every inch of him!"

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CHAPTER IX

TRAINING FOR THE TRENCHES

JUST as Mart had said, those were busy days for most of them, so much had to be attended to. Unfortunately a large amount of their material had become badly mixed up with other freight, so that it required considerable dexterity, and also much hunting to locate each lost article as the list was scanned and marked off.

Mart displayed an unusual proficiency in this work, and was given more or less of it to carry out. He received commendation from the lieutenant in charge of his detachment because of his success.

Several days went by, and all of them had recovered from the effects of the protracted voyage on a crowded steamship; where, as one humorous fellow said, "when a man wanted to turn over in his sleep, he had to sing out, and the whole row would change sides like a machine."

Then Tom got back. Harvey saw him coming as he and Mart were sitting by the entrance to their tent, and he had no sooner announced the fact than he followed it up by saying:

"You're safe so far, Mart, from settling that dinner wager; because Tom would be bringing the

old glasses along with him to prove his claim, if he'd found them; but he's only got a swagger-stick in his hand."

"Oh, yes, I've enjoyed my little leave more than I can tell you, fellows," Tom announced, after he had joined the other pair. "Havre is full of American boys in khaki, just as this place is. Fact is, they seem to be fairly swarming all over the country. I've heard it said folks are thinking of calling it New America nowadays, for we're surely colonizing it fast."

"I don't see your binoculars, Tom," remarked Harvey; "though of course you've brought them to camp with you. And how accommodating of that old hotel-keeper to have kept them for you all this time."

"I didn't find them there, I'm free to confess," admitted the other. "But I've got a clue, and I hope soon to be on the trail. There was nothing said between us, I believe, Mart, about time. I'm to have as long as I care to work the game, though if I find it hopeless I'll own up and stand the consequences."

"Tell us about it, will you, Tom?" pursued the other, for Harvey had a fair streak of natural curiosity in his make-up, as do most boys.

"Of course the hotel man couldn't recognize me," explained Tom; "and I didn't expect he would. But when I told him something of Lucille's and my

adventures between the lines of the hostile armies he seemed to remember. He hadn't forgotten Uncle Alvin, either, because he actually asked after my 'charming uncle,' as he chose to call him."

"But how about the glasses?" demanded Harvey.

"Yes, he remembered that a pair of fine glasses of a celebrated Paris optician's make had been found in one of the closets some time later on. He had laid them aside carefully, meaning to hold them in case the owner ever showed up, or communicated with him."

"Oh! Then did he never receive those anxious letters of yours?" Harvey pursued.

"He said they must have been lost on some of the steamships that were sent down by those terrible German submarines," Tom explained, "for never a word did he have from any one in America on that subject. So he kept the binoculars most carefully — up to six months ago."

"And then what happened, Tom?"

"He has a nephew — has the hotel-keeper — in Havre," came the answer. "And of course, like all Frenchmen up to fifty years of age who can bear arms, this man is in the army. His name is Captain Maurice Declosis."

"A pretty fine name, believe me," Harvey observed. "And so this captain is sporting your binoculars, is he, Tom?"

"The hotel man was very sorry, and told me so a dozen times," Tom continued. "He looked pained, too, for a fact. But, as he explained, it seemed such a great pity to have those fine glasses lying around doing no good, when there was a crying need of such things at the front, so he finally offered to loan them to his nephew the last time he paid him a brief visit."

"I like that!" jeered Harvey. "So he *loaned* your binoculars, did he, Tom?"

"He was in dead earnest, I tell you, Harvey, for he offered again and again to pay me any fair price for them. Of course I told him I could not take a centime of his money, but as the glasses had a personal value I would live in hopes of being able to recover them later on. So that's just how the case stands. I know who has my property, at least."

"Could he tell you where his nephew was stationed just now?" asked Harvey, who seemed to take it upon himself to carry on the entire conversation on that particular subject with Tom.

"Well, somewhere on the fighting front; that was as near as he could say," came the answer. "He impressed me with the historical fact that the Declosis family was a patriotic one, a former member having been one of Napoleon's favourite generals. But really he didn't know whether his nephew was living, or had paid the price for his country."

Letters are few in these terrible days, he said."

"Then you've got a healthy job ahead of you, I should say, Tom," chuckled Harvey. "I suppose there are something like a million or two Frenchmen facing the Huns right now. Quite some work to find a particular captain in such a crowd. Talk to me about finding a needle in a haystack—that would be easy beside your hunt."

"I've only started, please remember, Harvey, and I'm bound to keep things hustling until I've exhausted every device, but what I'll learn where this Captain Maurice Declosis is, if above ground. I never give up easily. And besides, there's such a thing as luck; though I don't mean to depend on any freak of fortune to help me win."

"Was Lucille quite well?" Mart managed to ask, just as though he had not been fairly burning to bring her name into the conversation for all of the five minutes since the coming of the young lieutenant.

"Couldn't be better, Mart," the other replied. "Though she has been working like a beaver ever since she arrived in France. Such sights that dear girl has looked upon would appal most fellows; but she's getting quite accustomed to such things by now, and seems to be a general favourite."

"It's wasting breath to tell Mart that, Tom!" exclaimed Harvey, "because of course he takes it for granted. Lucille is everybody's favourite, and

the finest girl going. But how does it come she's still in a Paris hospital, when Pershing is now at the front with some of our regiments, and they have already received their baptism of blood in the fighting alongside the French?"

"She told me she had just been notified that another American hospital unit was soon to go forward, so as to be back of the lines, and that her name had been among the list of nurses chosen for this duty."

Mart drew a long breath, and looked uneasy. However, he said steadily:

"Which means, of course, that she will be in more or less danger. Those Germans often shell towns many miles back of the lines, and in more than a few cases they have been known to pick out French hospitals to bombard, against every rule of civilized warfare."

"Lucille is aware of that," explained Tom, "for she has attended cases where nurses were terribly injured by bombs dropped deliberately on a field hospital by Hun airmen. But Lucille comes of good stock, and what others may stand she says she ought to. I'm proud of my sister; there never lived a braver girl than Lucille."

"That's right," added Mart, sturdily, unmindful of his cousin's grins. "You always did say that she showed wonderful nerve at the time the two of you were afoot in France, and got caught in the

fighting that was going on all around. But I'd feel easier if she stayed there in Paris."

"Lucille couldn't be induced to remain in safety, once she was asked to go to the front," said Tom, proudly. "She says she is no better than others who have not hesitated to take the risks. And then, besides, she has an idea she may be sent to the American sector, where our boys are beginning to relieve the hard pressed French army."

"Wouldn't it be queer," suggested Harvey, who seemed to think of everything, "if later on one of us should have the ill-luck to be wounded, and after we'd been taken in an ambulance to the hospital find that the nurse attending that section was no other than our own Lucille?"

"You could consider yourself pretty lucky," Tom told him, "if such a thing turned out to be the case; because Lucille is unusually successful in her chosen vocation."

"Oh, I think she'd seem like an angel to — well, to anybody in fact," and Harvey laughed again as he suddenly changed the sentence he had started, on receiving a threatening look from Mart.

Tom had some things to attend to, and could not stay any longer.

"I hope to see you often from now on, fellows," he told them. "But you mustn't think hard of me if I am compelled to treat you openly as a commissioned officer is supposed to, when meeting the men

of his command. Back of my stiffness you know the heart beats just as truly loyal for you as ever it did."

"And depend on it," Harvey assured him, "my salute will be given with more vim than to the biggest general on the line, because of the warm feeling that lies back of the same."

Two days after this conversation the order came to entrain and proceed to a permanent camp, where their education in modern methods of conducting war would continue under competent instructors selected by the French Government.

They had a wearisome journey of it, but were constantly discovering new and interesting sights as they proceeded. Few if any others in the battalion besides the three young friends had ever set foot on French soil before.

It pleased Harvey to note that they were at least heading partly into the north as they proceeded. All the fighting lay in that direction; and with the ardour that affects most new soldiers he felt an urgent desire to see at close quarters something of what was going on.

Mart, less eager, told him frequently to possess his soul in patience; for the chances were that before they were through with the game both of them would find themselves heartily sick of hearing the roar of great cannon and seeing the frightful havoc made by shells, and gas, and rapid-fire guns.

CHAPTER X

ORDERED TO THE FRONT

WINTER progressed slowly, and before long they would be talking of the coming of spring, with a new campaign opening before the fighting armies.

Their camp was very comfortable, and both Mart and Harvey felt they had little to complain about. The United States was looking after her absent sons in a manner never surpassed. Not only were the young soldiers being well fed and warmly housed, but the hospital attendance was first-class, while the popular Y. M. C. A. "huts," or canteens, seemed to be the centre of attraction in every camp.

There were the Salvation Army lassies in addition, also from the good old mother land, serving their hot doughnuts day after day to famishing men longing for anything that had a touch of the home flavour about it. And as for the pies those girls made in such vast quantities, they certainly left nothing to be desired even when compared with "those mother used to bake."

"Great news has filtered in from the fighting front, it seems, Mart," Harvey said one day late

in the winter. "Pershing has been pushing his men up into the trenches by battalions, so as to get them used to their surroundings. And already they've given a good account of themselves."

"Any new battle taken place since we had the last report?" demanded Mart.

"Seems so," he was informed. "Some of the Yanks have been brigaded with the French, and others are sandwiched in with the British and Canadians as well as the men from Australia and New Zealand. And from every side there is coming nothing but the highest praise for their fighting spirit."

"That doesn't surprise me in the least," remarked the other young soldier. "Americans have everything in them that goes to make good fighters, and something these Germans know little about besides, which is the initiative. Put the average Yank in a tight place, and he uses his brains to find a way out. The Hun would fight to the end; then hold up his hands and yell out 'Kamerad!' That's the difference in their natures, and also their training."

"I certainly hope our time is coming pretty soon now," sighed Harvey.

"Have patience, and it'll be along before a great while," advised Mart. "We know that tens of thousands of our men have gone to the front, even if there has been so little said about it. They're

getting a practical insight into trench work and into patrol duty in No-Man's-Land between the lines. When spring really opens, and Pershing is ready to take over an entire sector of the line, something big is bound to drop."

"Do you think we'll be there to share in the glory, Mart?"

"I see no reason to doubt it," the young sergeant assured him.

"We've been digging away for many moons now, and must be pretty apt in everything a fellow ought to know, from bayonet work and the throwing of trench bombs, to going over the top and finding shelter in shell-holes while we keep on advancing."

"I heard our captain telling some one that there were two men in his command who manipulated a rapid-fire gun better than anybody else he had ever seen; and though perhaps I shouldn't make you feel too proud by telling you this, but when he mentioned their names I surely heard him say Harvey Dorr."

"Oh! Oh, thank you for telling me, Mart!" exclaimed the other, flushing with pardonable pride. "But then that comes from my always feeling such an affection for my machine-gun. It seems just like a pet to me; though when it comes to spitting out bullets it's a regular little savage monster."

"Here comes our postman. I surely hope he has something for us," and of course Mart hastened to

waylay the one who was handing out letters to the jostling crowd surrounding him.

He speedily returned waving several envelopes.

"In great luck this time, boy," he told Harvey. "Here's one from father, and another from Silas Cooper whose flat feet kept him from being accepted when we enlisted. Poor Si felt mighty bad about it, and couldn't see why a fellow who had always played baseball and football, and was known to walk thirty miles in a day, should be black-balled just because his feet happened to be hard to fit with regulation army shoes."

They were soon deep in their letters, and reading out certain extracts to each other, boy fashion.

"Here's something especially interesting," said Mart, presently, "and it concerns the Bartlett boys, too."

Harvey immediately looked up, eager to hear what Mart had read.

"I hope it's good news," he hurried to say, "and that Frank and Thomas finally got safely out of Germany. Go on and tell me, can't you?"

"The news came in a roundabout way, it seems," Mart explained. "An American among the first to enter the fighting last October, and who was taken prisoner, managed in some fashion to escape from the place where he was being held. After a whole lot of surprising adventures he reached the Swiss border, and finally got across. He brought the

news that the two Bartlett boys were being held as prisoners there, and not any too well treated at that."

"Poor chaps!" muttered Harvey.

"Wait, that isn't all," cautioned his cousin. "Just before this man managed to break away he said the Caslons, Paul, Henry, and their mother, joined the others, having come over from Austria, though not allowed to leave the country because of their having a knowledge of the desperate internal conditions in the Central Powers."

"Here's Tom bustling toward us!" Harvey exclaimed. "I guess he must suspect we've had letters from home in this mail, and wants to hear the news."

His surmise proved to be a true one, for as soon as the lieutenant arrived he asked about letters, and of course soon heard all the home news. As in the case of Harvey, that concerning the interned friends seemed to interest him most.

"Of course we haven't the least idea in what part of Germany they are held," he remarked thoughtfully. "It might be away up near Berlin; and then again there's a good chance it will turn out to be a whole lot closer to the French border."

"What do you base that assertion on, Tom?" demanded Harvey.

"Simply because the American soldier who man-

aged to escape finally brought up in Switzerland," came the prompt reply.

"I see what you mean," continued Harvey. "If their place of internment was up above Cologne, or in the region of Berlin, for instance, that smart Yank must have headed straight for Holland, because that would be his only chance to get over the line."

"And," concluded Tom, seriously, "as he hit Switzerland, it stands to reason he must have been imprisoned down in Baden, Wurtemberg, or else somewhere in Alsace-Lorraine."

"Just to think of it, our poor friends may right now be within hearing of the big Berthas that are making the earth shake over there," Harvey observed. "I wish the opportunity would only come to us to do something for them, when we get to the front."

"That would be one chance in a thousand, I'm afraid," ventured Tom; "but it's a comforting thought, all the same, and does you lots of credit, Harvey. They must be pretty sick of being forced to stay there, and go on half rations. Frank used to have an enormous appetite, I remember; so that it is especially hard on him."

"Any fresh news about our chances for getting into the coming scrap, Tom?" asked Harvey.

"I don't know, and if I did, couldn't pass the in-

formation along, because it would be against the regulations of the army. That kind of thing is given only in confidence to officers, you must understand; and it is expected it will go no further. In times like these even the wind has ears, and German spies are as thick as flies in summer-time."

"Excuse me, I forgot that," hastily remarked the abashed Harvey. "Of course I wouldn't have you say a single word you shouldn't, Tom. But I'm getting the fidgets with all this waiting. We know our game from A to Z, and if they don't want us to go stale we ought to be hustled up closer to the fighting line. I'm wild to hear the big guns booming, that's what."

"Oh, it can't be so far away now," he was assured. "Any day we may receive orders to vacate this camp, which will be needed for some of the later arrivals. They will be coming over in shoals pretty soon, as many as three hundred thousand a month during the summer months, I understand." (See Note 5.)

"And where shall we fetch up then, if it's a fair question, Tom?" begged Harvey.

"Don't know," he was told, "but a whole lot closer to the fighting line than we are in this camp. Hold hard, and wait. They say everything comes to him who does."

Many more days passed. Then came a stir in the camp. They had received the long anticipated

order to vacate, as their "room was better than their company," as Harvey chose to put it.

Winter had now long since given place to spring. Reports continually reached them to the effect that the German High Command had determined to make a most stupendous "push," and try not only to reach Paris, but isolate the British armies, and press them against the sea at Calais and Dunkirk.

"If only we get there before they start their fighting," Harvey was heard to complain again and again.

"Just as though things might turn out quite differently for the Allies if our particular battalion has a place in the line when the Hun legions bear down upon it," jeered Mart.

Three days they marched, taking all their stuff along with them; three days during which they saw smiling fields that the peasant women were beginning to cultivate thus early in the season, for food was needed desperately by all France.

Then the scene shifted, and they began to come upon ruined villages, some of which were so utterly razed that hardly one stone lay upon another. The hand of the destroying Hun had been at work here. Isolated little groups of old men, children and brave-hearted peasant women were discovered heroically endeavouring to do some planting, while living in holes in the ground, or under rude tents fashioned from wretched blankets, or in fact any old thing.

In good time they arrived at their new camp. Harvey seemed a bit disappointed because they saw no positive signs of the French army. But that evening, as he and Mart stood exchanging words, there floated to their ears a strange half-muffled sound, coming from miles away, that electrified them both. Harvey, his face illumined with happiness, burst out with :

“At last, Mart, we hear it! That can be no roll of thunder, save of big guns. We are just back of the fighting front!”

CHAPTER XI

IN A GERMAN PRISON CAMP

IF those spring days seemed long to impatient Harvey Dorr, they dragged like lead with a party of young Americans whose acquaintance we must now make, as they have a share in the interest of our story.

Since Mrs. Caslon and her twin sons, Paul and Henry, had managed to join the Bartlett boys, being allowed to pass into Germany by the Austrians, things had brightened a little for Thomas and his brother. The widow still had a small part of her money, though the amount was decreasing at an alarming rate. With this she managed to secure better food for the party, and that was what the Bartletts needed most of all. (See Note 6.)

They were not confined in the detention camp with its electrified wire fencing, though that had been the fate of Thomas and Frank Bartlett previous to the coming of Mrs. Caslon and the influence of her money as bribes for easier treatment.

On a certain day, in the late spring or really early summer, that would always be memorable to those castaways as opening the door of hope afresh, they were gathered in front of the humble quarters where

they lodged. At no time could they get beyond sight of German sentries and guards who walked their beats close by.

Thomas Bartlett was thin and gaunt through continual lack of sustaining food during all those months that had passed since he and his brother had found themselves trapped in Germany at the breaking out of the great war. His face, despite its pallor, showed signs of firmness, and the glint in his eyes would strike an observer as evidence of an uncrushed spirit.

"We must never give way to such a thing as despair," he was saying at the time, for his younger brother Frank had been bitterly lamenting that their case seemed well nigh hopeless. "Sooner or later our chance must come; and I for one never allow myself to think of anything but returning home when the Allies have broken this proud spirit of Germany."

"If we only knew what America was doing it might give us comfort," said Mrs. Caslon, who was a thoughtful woman, and who at times found her faith in ultimate delivery sorely tried.

"But our guards are so careful that we shall never learn the least thing about how the war is going on the side of the Allies!" came bitterly from Paul, who seemed to be more pronounced in his views than his twin brother, even as he was also of a more athletic build than Henry.

"They like to torture us by boasting of what wonderful victories the Kaiser's armies are winning in Russia, Rumania, and even along the French front," added Frank Bartlett.

"But all of us believe they are just yarning when they talk that way," Paul continued, briskly. "They think it hurts us to hear such boasts; and anything that gives a fellow pain pleases a German, I do believe."

"Lower your voice if you must say such things, Paul," warned Thomas. "I saw that passing guard look sharply this way when you spoke."

"But few of these Landwehr troops, old chaps that they are, understand English," protested the other; nevertheless he did speak in a softer tone.

Paul had not been through the suffering that the Bartlett boys had experienced during the long period of their imprisonment, but he had seen enough of German cruelty since coming across from Austria not to wish to take chances of drawing punishment down on his head by making injudicious remarks aloud.

"Have you thought of any way we could escape from this wretched place, Thomas?" asked the widow, after making sure that she could not be overheard by even the keenest pair of hostile ears.

"I'd rather not say too much just now," came the low reply; "but depend on it I'm looking around and scheming all the while. It will take a whole

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lot of arranging to bring it to pass; but I have hopes it can be done, and that before a great while. But we must never allow our guards to suspect we are dreaming of cutting out of here. They'd put us every one behind those wires, to touch which means instant death because of the heavy charge of electricity they carry."

Paul looked all around him, and sighed as though he feared the glorious day when they would be free from their troubles must still be a long way off. How he had come to detest the scowling or sneering faces of those guards who seemed to take such delight in making life miserable for the prisoners in their charge! He firmly believed he could never again as long as he lived be on friendly terms with a German, though previous to the war he had had many warm friends at home who were of that nationality.

They were in Lorraine, and the great fortress of Metz lay not a great many miles distant. On clear days they had even been able to see one of the outlying forts defending the city that had been taken from France in the time of Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor.

"Ever since that American soldier made his escape from here, and headed south, hoping to reach Switzerland," Frank Bartlett presently observed, "we've heard nothing concerning our country save a lot of wild stories about draft riots, and the Ger-

man-Americans throttling the Government by the exercise of their power."

"If any other Americans have been captured none of them have been sent to this prison camp," ventured Thomas. "But from little things that have come to my attention, words picked up on the side and other sources of information, I'm of the opinion there are many thousands of our boys already across the sea."

"In spite of their old submarines," snapped Paul, "that they told us are sinking the heavily loaded transports on the average of one a week."

"Nothing but German boasting, and I don't believe a word of it!" exclaimed Frank; though his brother immediately gave his arm a nudge as if to warn him he was raising his voice above what might be considered the safety line.

"There's an airplane again!" remarked Henry Caslon, pointing as he spoke toward where, as they knew, the strong fortress of Metz lay.

It was a common sight to them, and aroused but passing interest. Almost every day they could see one or many dots in the sky, indicating the presence of the aviators who doubtless were stationed near the Lorraine capital, ready to defend it should a flotilla of enemy bombing planes make a bold raid with the object of damaging military property in the near vicinity.

A short time later Paul, who had been watching

the tiny object moving through the upper currents of the air, announced :

“ That chap seems to be heading directly for us, which I take it is an unusual occurrence. Look far back of him, and you can see another plane rising that must come from that fort we know lies there. Thomas, shall I get your glasses? ”

One of the strangest things of their long imprisonment lay in the fact that the older Bartlett boy had been able to retain possession of the pair of marine glasses with which he had started his trip of sight-seeing in the Rhine country before the war broke out.

They had seen rough usage, and were perhaps in too dilapidated a condition to tempt the cupidity of their German captors; but nevertheless the glasses had given Thomas and Frank a vast amount of pleasure, and helped to while away many an hour that otherwise would have hung heavy on their hands.

“ Just as you please, Paul,” the older Bartlett replied; “ but please handle them carefully. I’m always afraid they’ll go to pieces; and in that case we’d miss a lot of pleasure. Why, Mrs. Caslon, would you believe me, that pair of field glasses has almost saved the reason of Frank and myself. I mean to hang on to them just for their association until the very end.”

When Paul came out of the low building in which

they were quartered he proceeded to adjust the shaky glasses to suit his sight, and then focussed upon the approaching airplane.

This had continued to head directly for the camp, and the pursuing plane kept in its wake. The others were talking of something entirely different when they heard Paul give vent to an exclamation that betokened aroused interest, even excitement.

"I do believe that leading plane must be an Allied machine!" he suddenly thrilled them all by announcing.

"What makes you think that, Paul?" demanded Thomas.

"Why, it's built on entirely different lines from anything I've seen since coming here to Lorraine; different too from those we saw when in Austria. Now, the one further back is a Fokker machine, I'm certain. Wouldn't it be a great thing if they'd fight an air battle right over this camp, just as if it might be for our special entertainment?"

"Whee! hope they do then," gasped Frank, eagerly.

Thomas now took the glasses and looked.

"Paul, I do believe you are right, and that it is no German plane," he speedily reported to the waiting group, all eyes being now fastened on the upper regions.

The German guards were now calling out to one another and soldiers came running out of houses

where they were billeted, every one showing the most intense interest.

Even as they continued to stare and exchange excited remarks, the leading plane, now not more than a mile distant though at a great height, was seen to swing around. At first they believed this meant flight, and a groan of disappointment had already broken from the lips of the anxious Paul, when Thomas, still clutching his precious glasses, again thrilled them by saying:

"No, he's not running away, yet; but is challenging that German aviator to battle! Already he's cut out some of his speed, and seems to be waiting for Fritz to come along."

"What luck we are in to see all this!" remarked Frank, feverishly.

The excitement on the ground increased. Many of the German soldiers could be seen running this way and that, but as a rule heading in a direction that if pursued for a certain distance would take them under the rival planes.

"There, I saw a puff of smoke burst from the German plane!" cried Thomas. "And now the other is giving him back shot for shot!"

"And I can hear the rattle of the machine-guns in the bargain," announced Paul, hardly able to stand still for excitement.

CHAPTER XII

GLORIOUS NEWS FOR THE EXILES

“OH! Too bad! The Allied pilot is dropping! He’s been winged, I’m afraid!” ejaculated Frank, regardless now as to how he raised his voice; for none of the guards thought of paying them the slightest attention while that thrilling drama was being staged aloft.

“No, you’re wrong there, Frank,” his older brother immediately informed him. “That was just one of their tricks, you see. He took a dive, that was all, so as to better his position.”

“Sure enough, that must be so,” assented the other, “because now he’s spinning around again like a cricket, and peppering the German with his machine-gun fire like hot cakes.”

“Just hear the chatter, will you?” exclaimed Paul; and indeed, every sound came to them with startling distinctness, for the air is a splendid conductor, even as water always proves.

“This is as good as a circus, believe me!” said Frank.

Mrs. Caslon looked as though she might have been glad to shut her eyes to blot out the spectacle of

those spinning hostile planes, both spluttering madly by now and circling as though the pilots were seeking a vulnerable spot so as to send in a fatal round of bullets; but there was a fascination about the air duel that would not allow her to look away.

Things happen with extraordinary swiftness when such an encounter is in progress. Planes that are capable of going a full hundred miles an hour with ease may be expected to make wonderful evolutions when engaged in a battle, where a mishap is apt to spell death to the occupant of the unlucky craft.

Those who stood and stared entranced saw one of the most thrilling spectacles imaginable. Both pilots seemed to be capable men, perhaps "aces" who had half a dozen victories to their credit on the roll of fame; for they displayed astonishing ability in manipulating their respective plunging air steeds.

Several times those below would gasp and hold their breath for very awe as they imagined one or the other of the rivals was about to drop out of the remarkable duel. On each occasion, however, there had been a quick recovery that suggested an exchange of tricks.

"Oh! how is it going to end?" exclaimed Paul, quivering with the excess of his emotions. "That German must be a crackerjack of a pilot to hold out so well against the other fellow."

"They're mighty well matched, for a fact!" admitted Frank.

"There goes the German plane down again!" announced Henry Caslon.

"Another sly trick out of his bag!" echoed the sceptical Paul.

"I believe you're wrong there!" snapped Thomas, who had the advantage of being able to see much better on account of his field-glasses. "This time he's dropping in earnest! I can see him trying like mad to do something, but he keeps on falling like a rock!"

"It's all over but the shouting!" announced Paul, with more or less satisfaction in his voice, for according to his way of thinking the right man had won.

"Look! Oh, look! His plane has burst into flames!" gasped Henry, aghast.

It was true. The petrol tank must have been pierced by a ranging bullet from his rival's machine gun, and the inflammable liquid spurting out had now flashed into flames.

Mrs. Caslon could stand it no longer, but hid her face in her hands. No doubt she would be haunted for a long time by the memory of that terrible sight, with the helpless plane falling like a plummet, fire and smoke accompanying its rapid descent.

The four boys realized that they were witnessing a tragedy; but their experiences of the last three

years had made them better able to look upon such things than might have been the case before they undertook their unfortunate trip abroad.

A minute later the remains of the German machine had vanished from their sight. Not until then could the Americans find words to describe their sensations.

"Came down just like a falling rocket stick!" Paul declared.

"That poor pilot never knew what hurt him when he struck the ground, I imagine," Frank said, with a shiver.

"He was beyond feeling anything before that time, with all that fire surrounding him. Chances are he jumped out at the last," suggested Paul.

"But look at the victor up there," Henry now piped up, his voice betraying signs of weakness just then. "He doesn't seem in any great hurry to fly away. I should think this was a dangerous neighbourhood for an Allied airman to stay in, for over toward Metz I can see a whole flock of German planes beginning to climb above the hilltops."

"I've made a great discovery!" announced Thomas just then.

"What is it?" demanded Paul, with fresh interest.

"There's a design under the wings of that airman's machine that I can't quite make out, because

the colours have faded," Thomas told them; "but I honestly believe it might be an Indian head."

"What's that you are saying?" cried Paul. "An American Indian, do you mean, Thomas? Why, then that pilot up yonder must be a Yank!"

"And that would show that the Americans are in force along the French front!" added Frank, his face radiant with sudden great exultation.

"What wouldn't I give to be able to wave Old Glory, and let that brave pilot have a regular Yankee cheer!" burst from Frank, impetuously.

"If he only knew there were fellow Americans down here by this prison camp he might send us a message of cheer," suggested Henry Caslon.

"More likely it would be a bomb!" added Paul; and immediately subjoined: "Oh! look out, everybody, he's dropped something right now, and when almost directly over our heads."

"Don't be alarmed," urged Thomas, "for I don't believe it's anything like a bomb. Fact is, it looks to me like a folded newspaper attached to a small weight!"

"But see the Germans running to get clear, will you?" Paul exclaimed, more or less amused to notice how alarmed the guards became at the possibility of a terrible explosion when the supposed "bomb" struck the ground.

"I'm going to get that paper if it's possible!"

announced Thomas, as he handed the glasses over to his brother and started to run.

The airplane had sped swiftly on as though the daring pilot deemed discretion the better part of valour, with half a dozen foes rapidly rising, and evidently meaning to attack him with overwhelming numbers.

Two minutes later Thomas came hurrying back. The look of satisfaction on his face told the others that he had succeeded in his mission. They noticed, however, that he did not display anything resembling a newspaper, for fear lest one of the guards coming from his place of hiding might discover it and take it away before they had any opportunity to read the contents.

"Come, let us go inside," suggested Thomas, mysteriously, and all understood what he had in mind.

No sooner did they find themselves free from observation than Thomas with a trembling hand drew out the paper. It was a New York daily, and as he opened it the big headlines on the first page caused them to thrill with joy.

"Over five hundred thousand American soldiers sent abroad up to date!

"Expect to have two million across by November!

"Submarines defined, only one boat injured by torpedo attack thus far!

"Germany sees the handwriting on the wall!

"An American airplane squadron wins a big battle over the Huns!"

Paul began jumping up and down as though he might be engaged with a swarm of bumble bees in the meadow.

"Oh! isn't that great news, though?" he ejaculated. "After all these long weary years of waiting until we just grew sick with the uncertainty, and being fed daily on outrageous German lies, to think that America is doing so nobly! I feel so happy I could yell myself hoarse if I didn't fear they'd rush in here and mob us."

"Hide that paper, Thomas," said Mrs. Caslon, also greatly excited; "for we shall want to read every line in it later. It comes like a ray of light amidst the darkness of doubt and despair. I am very thankful. Bless that aviator for dropping this. It is worth more to us than rubies, for it brings good cheer, and hope, and renewed confidence."

Thomas evidently considered this advice well worth taking, judging from the promptness with which he hastened to conceal the paper under a faded length of carpet in the meagrely furnished apartment.

"But what object do you suppose he could have had?" asked Henry Caslon. "He most certainly couldn't know we were here, and longing for news of the big outside world."

"I imagine," remarked Thomas, promptly, "that he had an idea there were some Americans held prisoner in this pen with the barbed wire around it, and that he meant to let them know those across the sea were at work helping to cook the Kaiser's goose."

"That sounds reasonable," assented Paul, while Frank added:

"Hadn't we better step out again and act natural, so those guards will think we just piled in here for fear of bombs dropping on us?"

"Anything to keep that paper from falling into their hands," Thomas agreed. "I promise myself the greatest lot of pleasure reading news from the dear old homeland."

That seemed to be the one thought uppermost in all their minds. Exiled all these years, and unable to communicate with those they loved across the sea, they had suffered tortures that could not easily be described. And the finding of that paper was the first real intimation they had concerning the wonderful doings of their aroused countrymen. Money could never have bought that tattered newspaper from those new possessors, for it had carried with it a breath from home to their aching hearts.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DESPERATE CHANCE

WHEN they emerged from the house and gained the open air of course the first thing everybody did was to look aloft. It was immediately discovered that the airplane which they had such good reason to believe must be managed by an American pilot was already miles distant.

"They're chasing him good and hard!" remarked Paul. "But after seeing what a wonderfully game fight he put up against that first German I'm not worrying any about that chap; he's able to take care of himself."

So they stood and watched until all the planes had become as mere dots in the distance. The fugitive airman had swung around, and was leading the chase toward the southwest. It was in that direction, as Thomas had often figured out, that the nearest fighting front lay.

How many times had he and Frank stared toward that quarter and sighed with the unutterable longing that filled their hearts. It thrilled them now to believe that in a comparatively brief period of time that bold pilot would step out of his plane in the midst of a camp where Old Glory floated, while

thousands of valiant boys in khaki gathered around to hear what he had to tell concerning his adventures.

At least things were picking up. All of them felt much more cheerful than before the coming of that visitor of the clouds.

"I certainly hope," Paul said, later on, while they were still exchanging opinions concerning the recent event, "that some fine day I may learn the name of that Yankee pilot. I'd give something to be able to tell him what a fine thing he did when he dropped his month-old newspaper to us."

Several days afterwards Thomas was observed to look unusually serious. Mrs. Caslon noticed this first, and then Paul remarked it.

"There's something on his mind, that's evident," he told Frank and Henry, when he had beckoned them over; "and we ought to find out what it means."

"More trouble for us, I'm afraid," ventured Henry anxiously.

"You can't be sure of that because Thomas merely looks serious," Frank assured them. "When he's revolving something weighty in his mind he always acts as if he'd lost his last friend. Just as like as not he's arranged some scheme in his mind for our skipping out of here. That's his way of doing."

"Let's ask him," suggested Paul.

Thomas became aware of the fact that the others were watching him more or less curiously; for just then he came over to the little group. At the time they chanced to be outdoors engaged in airing their limited amount of bedding in the warm rays of the sun.

They saw him look to the right, and then quickly turn his head the other way, as though to make sure no eavesdropper was within hearing. This action served to whet the curiosity now consuming them.

"What's on tap, Thomas?" demanded Paul, bolder perhaps than any one of the others.

"I meant to tell you about it before we had our bite this noon," remarked the other, "and I suppose now's as good a chance as any. Well, the time's come for our little venture!"

"Do you mean getting away from here, and trying to reach the Allied lines, or crossing over to Switzerland, as that American soldier did?" asked Paul, deeply thrilled by the news, as the other knew he would be.

"I believe I have made all arrangements," continued Thomas, lowering his voice, as a conspirator should.

"The sooner the better, so far as I'm concerned," Paul continued. "For one, I've seen more than enough of German ways to last me a lifetime. And say, wait until I can get to sample Yankee cooking again, that's all! When can we start, Thomas?"

"This is Wednesday," he was told; "and tomorrow night is the time I've set for making the attempt."

The information pleased the others very much, although Mrs. Caslon looked grave as she contemplated what serious chances they were taking in thus running away. But she had determined not to hesitate if the opportunity ever came, let the danger be what it might.

"But what's the big idea, Thomas?" further asked Paul. "Do we leave here by airplane express?"

"I wish we could do something of that sort," said the other; "but no such good luck has come to us. We shall have to accept a more humdrum method of taking leave. And if you must know it, I've had my hands full managing to get even such a common conveyance as a market wagon."

"That sounds interesting, anyhow," remarked Frank. "Are we going to make up as peasant truck-growers, taking our early green stuff to market?"

"A pretty good guess, Frank," his brother told him. "Paul here and myself can pass as natives, because our German is of a better variety than any of the rest of you can claim. If we're stopped on the road, which I expect will happen more than once, we may be able to pull the wool over the eyes of the soldier guards, and get them to let us pass."

"Well, for one I'm glad the opportunity is going to come to try out some kind of plan," Frank pursued; indeed, he was so tired of being kept a prisoner in that isolated camp that he would have welcomed a promising plan of liberation along even more desperate lines than that proposed by Thomas.

"I've managed to buy the outfit with money Mrs. Caslon gave me," continued the chief plotter, "though I know the old rascal cheated me by charging twice what it was worth. But then I suppose he suspected something of the truth, and meant to get out of here while the going was good."

"Then we have one more day to wait, have we?" asked Paul.

"I had to arrange it that way for a number of reasons, which I'm not going to explain just now," Thomas told him.

"What a long dreary day tomorrow promises to be for all of us," Henry remarked, sighing as he spoke, as though he wished with all his heart the interval could be more quickly spanned.

"It'll pass all the same," Thomas went on to say, consolingly. "Meanwhile all of us must be on our guard. Those Germans have sharp eyes; and if they find any reason to suspect the truth it'll be all up with our chances of getting away."

"Mother hasn't said a single word so far," Paul said.

"I hope you are in favour of our trying this plan of Thomas', Mrs. Caslon?" Frank hastily broke in with, taking the alarm at once.

"There is nothing else for me to do but agree with the rest," she told them, smiling bravely. "I shall certainly accept the risk. But I fear I am not much of a heroine, and the presence of danger gives me a chill in the region of my heart. But not for worlds would I be guilty of casting a damper on your plans, Thomas."

It was concluded to say as little as possible about the matter, and that only under their breath, so that no vagrant wind might carry a word to hostile ears and ruin all. Thomas assured them he had arranged everything necessary. There would even be a quantity of food along, so that it might not be required of them to seek houses along the road in order to secure a badly needed meal and thus run the risk of betrayal by their lack of genuine German tongues.

None of them slept very soundly that night, it may easily be believed. Their quarters were no more confined than usual, and the night seemed as favourable for slumber as anything could be; but a restlessness had taken hold upon one and all, so that they often awoke from troubled naps, and then lay awake, speculating on what another forty-eight hours might have in store for them.

The last day dawned, and wore along. If Frank

or Paul seemed inclined to grow impatient, either Thomas or Mrs. Caslon would soothe them with words of hope and good cheer.

So evening came. Never had there been such a lengthy day. Paul vowed some modern Joshua must have ordered the sun to stand still over the hills in the west, for it hung above the horizon long after he believed it ought to have sunk to rest.

But night set in at last, much to their relief. No one had much appetite for the frugal supper provided by their guardians; and yet as a general thing the boys were as hungry as hawks when the evening meal came around.

One thing favoured them. The two Bartlett boys had been in this particular prison camp nearly two full years now, having been transferred, for some unknown reason, from their first detention quarters up near the Holland border shortly after a state of war was declared to exist between the United States and Germany.

They had up to now never tried to run away, simply because under normal conditions they knew they had no chance of getting clear. Consequently the Germans, while they kept an eye on the Americans, accepting their money at the same time, did not seem to suspect they would ever muster up sufficient courage to strike out in an attempt to escape.

"It promises to be an ideal night for our venture, you've noticed, I suppose, fellows?" Thomas

said to the other three boys just after supper had been dispatched, and they were alone again.

"Partly cloudy, you mean, and dark in the bargain?" hazarded Paul.

"Yes; both conditions ought to help us more or less," said the pilot of the expedition.

"I hope we don't get lost, and head further into Germany instead of drawing closer to the border. We'll have no stars shining tonight to guide us, remember, Thomas."

"That doesn't matter much," he was assured. "I have a little compass I've been carrying around with me as a charm for my watch chain; and when I was so kindly relieved of my American time-piece I managed to save the compass. It's quite reliable, for all its tiny size. And more than that, I've studied the chart of the country roundabout here as it hangs on the wall in the guard-room, so that each day I could add just a fragment to the one I was drawing in secret."

"And is that completed?" demanded Paul.

"I've got it with me, all ready for service," came the answer.

They tried to act naturally, and in due time made preparations for seeking their cots; but in reality it was to lie there, dressed as they were, waiting until the minute arrived when Thomas, as the head of the venture, would give the word that meant immediate action.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLIGHT

“PAUL!” came a sibilant whisper in the darkness, “it is time.”

“All right, Thomas,” softly replied the one whose name had been called; and half a minute afterwards they were all clustered together, for of course every ear had been strained to catch the signal.

Thomas picked up a package which he had kept concealed under his cot, and each of the others also had some of their poor personal belongings which they considered worth saving. Mrs. Caslon, who had been favoured with a cubby-hole of a room adjoining the one in which the four boys slept, had purposely left the connecting door ajar for that one particular night.

Next the leader crept softly to the outer door, which, on being opened part way, allowed him to take an observation.

“Coast is clear,” he whispered over his shoulder, well knowing that his companions were close by, eager to know what the prospect was. “Guard at the other end of his beat, chatting with the next sentry. It’s got to be a regular habit with him lately.”

Thomas knew this because he had been for some time past making himself familiar with the actions of the German guards, looking forward to this particular time when such knowledge might prove useful.

"Shall we make the attempt now?" asked Paul, softly.

"No use waiting; come on, everybody, and be very careful not to stumble."

The fateful moment was at hand, for which they had, in a way, practised for so long. How often, for instance, had Paul counted the steps that must be taken in order to pass around the corner of the low building, so as to get beyond range of the sentry's vision, should he happen to be looking in that direction?

Any one of them could have passed along in the blackness of night, so familiar had they become with their surroundings. And so they trailed after Thomas, like a line of sombre ghosts, making no sound save a slight rustling as of a woman's skirts, or the whisper of the night breeze through the dense foliage overhead.

When the two guards became engrossed in their low argument, possibly with regard to the ending of the war and the hope of an early return to their distant homes, they were for the time being oblivious to all other things. What need of being con-

stantly on the alert when escapes from that wired pen were of such rare occurrence that the risk seemed almost negligible?

So the escaping prisoners turned the corner. After that there was a little less cause for apprehension; but there still remained much to be done before they could consider themselves well out of the German prison camp.

Thomas deserved much credit for his leadership. Not once did he blunder; nor was there any stumbling.

Presently things grew easier. The fleeing party had proceeded far enough to lessen the danger of discovery. Just where Thomas had the wagon hidden, none of the others as yet knew, but they thought it could not be a great way off.

"Courage, we're almost there," the leader now said in a low voice.

Then a sudden spasm of fear shot through them all. Some sort of disturbance broke out in their rear. Of course the first thought passing through their minds was that their disappearance had been discovered, and this would mean an immediate calling out of the troops and an end to their long cherished dreams of flight.

"Don't worry," came in the confident tones of Thomas; "it's only a couple of dogs fighting, and one of the guards trying to separate the beasts. It

has happened more than a few times before now. All's well, and here's the place where our wagon is waiting for us!"

Considerably relieved by this communication, the others followed Thomas into a shed. It was quite dark there, although the stars relieved the gloom where no roof intervened.

Immediately all became conscious of the fact that there was a horse in the place, for a low whinny greeted their entrance. Thomas struck one of his precious matches, of which he had been collecting a meagre supply for weeks, looking to this emergency.

Sure enough, there was a covered wagon with a horse attached. The animal was not much of a beauty, and had never been commandeered for military purposes on that account. At the same time Thomas knew they could count on getting a fair amount of speed out of the horse he had succeeded in purchasing, together with the vehicle.

There was considerable truck in the latter, as well as some sweet hay. Thomas had seen to all of that beforehand. Mrs. Caslon must be helped to make herself as comfortable as possible in the body of the vehicle, with Frank and Henry to cover her up under some of the hay, following suit themselves.

"Get up on the seat, Paul," said the guide, eagerly, "and I'll lead the horse outside this shed.

It's time we were on the road, for every minute must count from now on."

Both Paul and Thomas had done what they could to give themselves more of a German cast. Their clothes by this time were in a dilapidated condition, and it needed very little to make them look like peasant truck-growers. In case they were stopped and questioned they had their story all arranged.

The start was made, and presently Thomas was urging, by his use of the whip, the poor old wreck of a beast to trot along, doubtless thus considerably surprising the "rack of bones" as Paul had immediately dubbed their steed. Of course they made it a particular point to use only German whenever they called to the horse, or even talked to each other; for there could be no telling what hostile ears might be close by, and certainly a single word spoken in English was apt to arouse suspicion, and thus endanger their safety.

Every minute of progress took them further away from their late detested prison quarters. Paul hoped deep down in his heart they might never have the ill-luck to see that uncomfortable little old building again. What days and nights of longing they had spent there since he and Henry and their mother had found a way to leave Austria and join the others.

An hour, two, three of them passed.

All this time they had been following the road,

though several times it became necessary for Thomas to stop the horse, get out himself, and, climbing a guide-post at the junction, strike a match in order to read what was inscribed thereon in German.

Not for nothing had he studied that friendly road chart in the guard-room whenever he found an opportunity and felt that he was unobserved. The fruit of his industry was now being harvested.

More time was consumed. It was long after midnight, and they must have covered a considerable number of miles, for Thomas had not hesitated to make use of his frayed whip whenever the wretched horse displayed signs of wanting to rest.

Paul frequently leaned forward, and seemed to be staring ahead. They had met a number of detachments of soldiers coming from the front; and twice some sort of motor vehicle came along which they had reason to believe must be German ambulances. These Thomas skilfully avoided, being warned of their approach by a dim light, as of a lantern.

Every time any questions were asked Thomas would reply that they were on the way to Headquarters with garden stuff that had been ordered by the general. His knowledge of German, and also with regard to who was in charge of that section allowed him to tell such a story that those who would have liked very much to lighten the load did

not dare meddle, knowing how severely such action would be punished.

Once things looked serious for them. This was when they were hailed and ordered to stop by three soldiers who stepped from the bushes. Thomas understood of course that they must be a picket guard. He was prepared to tell the same old story, in the hope of carrying it off again, but the first words spoken by the German sergeant in charge gave him sudden cause for anxiety.

"We are watching the road for a French spy who was dropped from an airplane somewhere back of here. You may both be loyal Lorrainers as you say, and this load in your wagon meant for the burgomaster in the village beyond, but we must search your wagon. It might be this spy has concealed himself under the hay without your knowledge."

Paul gripped the arm of his companion when he heard this said. All seemed lost, for of course the soldiers would quickly discover the three who lay hidden there, and it would be their duty to take the entire party before their superior officer in some camp not far away, where the truth must be revealed.

Fortunately Thomas had even prepared for this emergency, thanks to having such a long head. He immediately arrested the attention of the sergeant by exclaiming:

"It would be hard for us if you disturbed anything, my friend! See, it is a paper that I carry, written by order of General Von Amberg, in which he asks that no one interfere with our load. It has all been so carefully packed, and the general would be angry if any of his soldiers upset it all. Here then is a sample of what we are taking him, to which you are welcome in the name of the Germany which we all loyally serve."

The bait took. Perhaps the three soldiers had been reduced to scanty rations of late, and the prospect of food interested them more than the carrying out of their instructions.

It was with greatly relieved minds that the fugitives resumed their progress. Those in hiding had also grown cold with apprehension over the delay. They had heard what the gruff sergeant said in such a loud tone, and their knowledge of German, while not so extensive as that of Paul and Thomas, was sufficient to allow them to understand the meaning.

But they were on their way again, which gave them fresh comfort. Besides, these various encounters so successfully turned by the resourceful Thomas, bade them have renewed hope. Surely they might believe that all would yet turn out well.

It was their intention to hide during the ensuing day. If fortune were kind they would then be able to continue their flight with the coming of another

spell of darkness; though what lay beyond that time they could only guess.

As the night deepened and morning could not be far away, they realized that the time was close at hand when they must look for a wood where they could hide themselves, and secure some rest. The constant excitement was very wearing; and, besides, the poor horse seemed almost ready to drop in his tracks with fatigue; so that it required frequent, almost continual use of the fragment of a whip to urge him along.

The city of Metz doubtless lay back of them, though they had kept to a direction almost due west. This could not be told from any glow in the heavens; for owing to enemy air raids such a waste of light had long since been strictly forbidden.

Indeed, Paul had an idea they might even have passed across the old boundary line, so that the road they now followed lay upon French soil. The very thought was exhilarating.

"Oh! wouldn't it be great," he insisted on whispering in the ear of the driver, "if we should actually see a French sign on a guide-post? Though I suppose those Germans would never stand for that. But why do you keep turning your head that way, Thomas? Do you hear anything?"

"Listen!" his companion said in reply. And after straining his ears to catch any suspicious sound, Paul went on:

“I can hear the rumble of our wagon wheels, and the plod of Dobbin’s hoofs on the hard road — Oh, there! I seemed to catch something else. Tell me, Thomas, are we followed? Is that the sound of galloping horses?”

“Nothing else, Paul,” said the other, gravely. “And they’re coming swiftly as if in pursuit! I’m afraid our escape has been discovered!”

CHAPTER XV

IN THE TRENCHES

WHEN Harvey Dorr declared that in his opinion their new camp was situated not many miles back of the actual fighting line, he "hit the nail squarely on the head," as he himself might have expressed it.

Mart was of the same mind, for often at times during their first night in the new location they could hear that suggestive "grumble," and even feel a slight tremor of the earth under them.

"I guess our time is coming soon," Harvey said.

They were at the time devouring a breakfast of bacon and coffee, flanked by bread baked in Yankee army ovens, and white bread at that, the wonder of all the natives, who had seen nothing but their black "staff of life" for several years, with precious little of even that.

"No question about it," his cousin told him. "When a shell can drop close to this camp and make every fellow jump to his feet as if shot out of a cannon, the enemy can't be a great way off."

"Do you know, I was dreaming when it happened," chuckled Harvey, "and my first thought

was that an earthquake had struck us. Why, my ears just sang for a long time afterwards. Some of the boys are saying the shell struck only a little way off there, and was really meant to drop in the middle of this cantonment."

"Tom was around here a while ago, when you were doing something for our captain," Mart continued. "He told me they believed that monster had been fired from an immense Austrian howitzer, like the one we heard was used to drop shells on Dunkirk along the Channel coast, from Ostend—more than twenty miles distant."

"Is that possible, do you think, Mart?" asked the other, sceptical as usual.

"No doubt about it," he was assured. "The angle with which a gun is fired has everything to do with the distance the projectile will carry. It's even said the Germans have made an enormous gun that they expect to bombard Paris with from a point sixty miles away!" (See Note 7.)

That was really too much for Harvey, who laughed derisively as he remarked:

"Tell that to the marines, Mart; it's too far stretched for me to believe. Sixty miles! They might as well say a hundred, and have done with it! When the Germans get to boasting, they can outdo old Baron Munchausen easily."

Mart smiled, but, averse to entering into an argument, made no reply. Truth to tell, he could not

"swallow" the story himself. It was enough to stagger any one's credulity.

"I wonder," observed Harvey shortly afterwards, "if we could get permission to walk out to where that shell struck around two o'clock this morning. I'd like to see with my own eyes what sort of damage it did."

"I was thinking the same thing myself," his cousin announced. "Nothing like trying; and bunches of the boys seem to be going off."

"Perhaps," suggested Harvey, "our officers are only too glad of the chance to let the men see their first shell-hole, because they'll become pretty familiar with such things in due time. How many craters can we remember going around when we were trying to reach Antwerp?"

It proved possible to secure the desired permission, and accordingly they joined one of the groups going out. Mart, as a non-commissioned officer, was put in charge, under instructions to keep the men from straying, and to herd them back within a certain time.

The cavity was like the excavation for a skyscraper, one of the khaki boys declared, who evidently came from some large city where such sights were of common occurrence. Although the enormous missile had fallen at some distance from the camp it had struck the road directly, making a wide detour necessary.

All sorts of talk was going around. Scraps of information, or it might be the wildest sort of rumours, found ready believers.

"No use talking," one man declared, with a shake of his head, "those Germans are as smart as a steel trap. They have spies everywhere, I've heard say, and chances are they knew just the time to the fraction of a minute when that ammunition train of motor trucks was going to pass along here. I was talking with one of the drivers, and he told me they had just swung clear with the last truck when, bang! this bean dropped square on the road. It was a close shave, all right. The Germans missed by just one minute!"

The days passed, and each morning it was hoped they would receive the order to leave camp and to enter the trenches, to get their first experience in the new life. The novelty would soon wear off, and possibly those who were now so anxious to go in would be equally glad to come out.

Harvey grew more and more filled with talk of "tanks," "armoured cars" and every other thing that had to do with this wonderful modern war. Those who managed to get papers from home passed them around, so that no one need be ignorant concerning what was going on in the vast field of action.

They discussed the doings of the Italians holding their Austrian foes so determinedly along the Piave

before Venice; they also exchanged opinions with regard to the outcome of the Mesopotamian campaign around Bagdad, and the later advance in Palestine, where Jerusalem itself was said to be the goal of the daring British column.

Then the other front in the Balkans came in for notice; also the Russian collapse, as well as what was already being done to draw Siberia out of danger of being made a German province.

In fact, there was so much to talk about that tongues were seldom idle whenever two or more of the Americans managed to get together. So while the days dragged to a certain extent, there was always a feverish expectancy in the air, and never a morning broke but that the paramount thought in each young mind was: "Will it come today?"

What joy ran through the whole battalion when the order finally did arrive to make ready to enter the trenches. At last they were to see what real action meant. This thing of being so near, and yet out of the action, was really demoralizing them, and wearing on their nerves.

There followed a march of ten miles or more, then they again went into a temporary bivouac. Dog-tents only, if any, were allowed them now, for after night had fully set in they expected to again take up their march, to bring up finally in those trenches of which they had heard such marvellous stories for ever so long.

"It's high time we got in the mix-up!" complained Harvey, as he trudged along at the side of his cousin, for on the march the strict military rules were relaxed to some extent. "I hear the great German offensive has started, and that they're pushing the French and British armies back."

"They're both outnumbered," admitted Mart, "and pretty well tired in the bargain. As you say it's time some fresh blood was let into the game. The Americans are just spoiling for a fight, and wild to show Fritz that he isn't the only pebble on the beach. But things are coming to a crisis before many moons, if the signs are right."

"I only hope we get a chance to do something worth while then before the Huns throw up their hands and quit," complained Harvey, who, of course, could hardly dream of the thrilling scenes through which he and the other members of that very battalion were fated to pass before snow flew again — events that were to be read with pride by millions of Americans at home, and which would stamp the participants as heroes, every one.

Along towards six in the afternoon the troops were given supper. At the time the battalion lay in a scrub thicket that extended along the road on either side. The boys could see everything that passed — ambulances darting along, either full or empty; armoured cars; big and little tanks; United States army motor-trucks carrying supplies or am-

munition to the front; field gun batteries changing base; and once a monster cannon drawn by a tractor caused Harvey to begin to believe there might be something in the story of the wonderful German long-range gun that could shoot several times across the English Channel between Dover and Calais.

Then came darkness. Knowing they would presently be on the move the soldiers tried to possess their souls in patience. Nevertheless it was with considerable satisfaction that they heard the order come to prepare to go forward.

All talking was tabooed from that time on, not a word louder than a whisper being allowed, and then only when necessary. Silently the long line wound in and out, for the regular road was no longer followed, but some sort of trail that had been worn in the soil by the passage of thousands on thousands of feet entering and leaving the trenches.

Looking beyond they could mark lights in the sky, and frequently there would flash up a dazzling glow as the German star-shells exploded high in the air, being designed to betray any movement of patrols across the open stretch of country between the hostile lines, known as "No-Man's-Land."

At such times the whole line had orders to stand perfectly still. It could be expected that German observers armed with powerful night-glasses were perched on crags where they could view much of the ground back of the American line, and if their

attention was attracted by any movement, as if in force, the chances were a sudden rain of shells would descend on that identical spot, which was apt to be far from welcome to the officers in charge of the adventure.

After an hour of this sort of thing they found themselves entering a shallow depression. This was really the beginning of a cross trench, and after threading it for a distance they came to one that ran parallel with the front.

There could be no doubt about their having arrived at their goal. Lined up on one side, or passing them within arms' length silent figures could be dimly seen whenever one of the German star shells burst like a rocket far above. These they knew to be the members of the battalion that had been holding the American sector of trenches for the last ten days or so, and whom they were now ordered to displace, the experienced ones going back to the rest camp far in the rear, there to await the call to serious action.

Harvey heaved a sigh of contentment when he found that he was to stop weaving his way through all that zigzag gap in the ground. His appointed place in the line was now assigned him, and he received his orders concerning his duties for that night.

It was with a strange sense of exhilaration that he peered over the apex of the barrier, and looking

off towards the German lines realized that the time was drawing near when he too, as myriads of other brave men had done, would be "going over the top."

CHAPTER XVI

THOSE WHO "GO OVER THE TOP"

"**H**OW are you feeling about trench life now, Harvey?"

It was Tom who asked this question. A number of days had passed since their introduction to the first line. Tom during this time had seen but little of his two close friends, though he had not been far away. Duties claimed much of his attention, and then again it would not do for him to be seen too often in the society of those who did not belong to the officer class.

"Oh, I'm soaking it all in, and so far I must say I rather like it," Harvey told him. "Still, I admit the novelty is beginning to wear off, and I can already see what horrible nests these holes in the ground must become when it rains for several days, or else snows, and freezes."

"More than half of our ten days has passed," ventured Mart, "and the boys seem to be making themselves at home. I believe some of them half expect to be sent over the top one of these grey mornings when a fog comes along to offer a curtain."

"Not likely any such luck will happen to us," complained Harvey. "For the life of me I can't see why the Americans aren't allowed to do *something*. It makes me groan to learn that the Huns are pressing our Allies back with every fierce plunge. Why, they're talking of taking Paris again, and of crowding the British army into the Channel!"

"Go easy there, and don't worry, boy," counselled wise Tom, who was in a position to know more of what was happening than either of the others, on account of his position. "The Allied command is going to be placed in one pair of hands pretty soon; and if the man to be made head of all the armies turns out to be General Foch, as they say, Hindenburg and Ludendorff will have to look out. He showed what he could do at the battle of the Marne, and will save the day for us. That's a prophecy, remember."

"All very good, Tom," remarked Mart, chuckling; "I've heard you make a prediction before now, and have it go back on you. There's that wager we have between us for example. I've no doubt you are still trying as hard as ever to find your Captain Maurice?"

"Sure he is, Mart," spoke up Harvey, laughingly. "I've seen Tom eyeing every French officer he's met for months, as if he wanted to ask him if his name could be Declosis. And say, when he chanced to notice one of them carrying a pair of

binoculars in his hands it was great to watch how our comrade here would glue his eyes on the same, as if something told him he had really discovered his lost property."

Tom took all this chaffing in good humour.

"I confess that up to now I haven't found my man," he told them. "I ran down a lot of promising clues, only to be disappointed. Why, I even found a Declosis, too, but he was a major, and said the captain must be his first cousin, though he didn't know where he could be found, or even if he was alive."

"My mind is getting easier about that dinner," remarked Mart. "I've been holding out a little cash every time a paymaster came around; but I think I'll be safe to use that hoarded money, if the need shows up."

"I'd advise you to hold on a little longer," Tom continued. "Something tells me I'm bound to run across my man before a great while, and get back my property in the bargain. You know I'm carrying that paper the hotel keeper in Havre gave me, addressed to his nephew."

After this conversation more days passed, and nights also. The members of the battalion became quite proficient in acquiring the "trench habit," and learned all the little "wrinkles" attending such a queer existence. The only real experience that was still lacking consisted in meeting an attack of the

enemy; and as the Germans in this sector had no intention of forcing an issue with the Americans this could not be remedied.

When the ten days scheduled for the battalion expired, they expected to receive orders to prepare to evacuate some night upon being relieved by a fresh force that was in need of the experience.

After all Harvey would not be sorry. He felt that he had had all the trench experience for the time being that he "hankered after," as he frankly admitted.

"When we come back here again," he added, "let's hope it will be only to make ready to go over the top and chase those Fritz chaps off the map. I'm tired of seeing them holding the fort over yonder, when we know it's French ground they're squatting on."

Again and again of late Harvey was wont to gaze seriously away to the northeast, with thoughts concerning his missing friends passing through his mind. Mart, too, often spoke of the Bartletts and the Caslon boys, wondering where they were, and whether in desperate straits after all these months upon months of imprisonment.

Little did either of them dream that the objects of their anxious conversations were at that very time not fifty miles away, and nightly planning the means of escape from their captors.

Strange things did Harvey see while spending

that educational period in the trenches. There was not a day that the rival armies did not exchange artillery fire, so that the roar of guns and of bursting shells became more or less familiar to the newcomers.

Then, when the weather admitted flights, the airmen were busily engaged, and at times dozens might be seen at once, conducting raids, taking photographs of enemy works, making observations of troop dispositions in the rear of the fighting lines, guiding the fire of batteries, so that ammunition dumps might be exploded by dropped shells, and in various other ways proving that the aviator had finally come into his own as the most valuable arm of the service.

The German High Command in charge of the force opposite the Americans showed an intense ambition to learn the numbers and disposition of the Yankees; for their airmen were constantly trying to fly back over the country in the rear, looking for concealed or camouflaged units of troops, or else some of the wonderful war devices which they doubtless suspected the ingenious Americans had brought over with them.

"It's mighty plain to be seen," observed Harvey at one time when he and his two comrades were talking about this uneasiness manifested by the enemy forces, "that Fritz feels in his bones that the finishing stroke is to come through us Yanks. They're

keeping divisions here that really ought to be over where the Huns are trying to break through, so as to relieve their men who are getting stale with constant fighting."

"Good for you, Harvey!" commented Tom, slapping the other on the back, careless as to any one who might be looking in surprise to see an officer so free. "Now that you've freed your mind, I don't hesitate to tell you that that was the conclusion we arrived at when we talked matters over at mess today."

"And shall we be given a chance to hit hard, Tom — soon, too?" asked Harvey. But Tom only laughed as he replied:

"Ask me something easy, such as where will Kaiser Wilhelm be twenty years from now, and perhaps I might try to answer you. If I knew I couldn't give you the first hint, Harvey, without misusing my position as an officer. But soon or late it's bound to come. Foch is going to be the man, we've heard. All the Allies are agreed on that. And I've no doubt he's already got his plan of campaign mapped out. Hold hard, and the hour for our American boys will strike!"

"One thing sure," Harvey did say as if his mind was made up; "I can understand now all that it means to go over the top, after spending these days and nights in the trenches and seeing what takes place out there every time the patrols go on a raid

to fetch in prisoners, who are put through the third degree to wring information from them."

"Yes, we've all learned a heap about all such things," admitted Tom.

"We know," Mart interjected, "what it must mean to rush forward into a barrage, to duck into shell-holes, and lie there while all around the ground is being torn up with bursting bombs and riddled with a storm of bullets from machine guns."

"Yes," said Harvey, solemnly; "and I do believe that the man who goes over the top, and lives to tell the story after the carnage, must always be reckoned a true hero; and for one I take off my trench cap to him."

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRENCH RAID

ONLY two more days remained for the battalion to occupy the trenches, and then, their specified time being up, they would return to camp, there to stay until the time came for the First American Army to be thrown into action as a unit.

Mart came in with great news that made Harvey envious of his cousin's good luck.

"Well, I'm ordered to conduct a trench raid to-night, and my men have been picked out for me," was what he told the other.

"That's glorious news, Mart!" snapped Harvey, his eyes glistening with interest; "and I hope my name is on the list."

"Sorry to tell you it isn't, Harv," said the sergeant, though if the truth must be told he was also glad in one sense.

Mart understood what these trench raids meant, and the danger that lay in store for those who went out under cover of darkness to try to pick up prisoners who might yield important information, or else hurl a few bombs into some of the outer German dugouts just to let them know the Yankees were on the field.

More than a few times such patrols had run across strong enemy forces lying in wait, with a trap set and baited. The result had been a fierce engagement, and not all who went forth so gaily came back. Some were killed, others wounded more or less severely, while not a few fell into the hands of the enemy.

So deep down in his heart Mart was not wholly sorry his younger cousin had not been chosen to join the force he had been ordered to lead on one of these night excursions into No-Man's-Land.

Of course Harvey was very much disappointed, but he soon got over that feeling. Troubles never held possession of happy-go-lucky Harvey for any great length of time.

"I suppose it's all right, Mart," he presently announced, with a shrug of his shoulders and a grimace that meant resignation, as well as a "what can't be cured must be endured" feeling. "Perhaps they thought one representative of the Dorr family was enough at a time. Who knows but that I may get my chance tomorrow night. I'm going to hope so, anyhow."

Mart had been making a special study of these night patrol raids, and believed he had mastered the whole matter thoroughly. Of course he was to have with him one who had been out on many such an undertaking. There were too many chances of disaster coming upon them to permit a novice to

lead such a raid without an efficient adviser along.

Their preparations were simple enough and soon made. The night promised to be at least fairly dark, which would be in their favour. At the same time, as the enemy was so lavish in his use of star shells which, when exploded above the open ground, lighted up the entire vicinity as with electricity, it was always necessary to remain rigid whenever such an illumination came.

"You see," Mart had explained to his cousin as they talked these matters over in confidence earlier that evening, "many eyes are glued to night glasses every time one of those star-shells bursts, and the white flare drifts down as you've seen some sky-rockets do. And the least movement attracts attention. So we must all freeze in our tracks until darkness comes again."

"I can understand why that is," Harvey had replied, thoughtfully. "The German trenches may be close by, and there'd be a regular hail of machine-gun bullets sweep the ground if they discovered creeping enemies around. I hope you don't run up against such a fire, Mart."

"Same here, boy; but such a chance has to be taken by every patrol raider who starts out," and Mart tried to look as though his heart beat at its normal gait, though truth to tell his nerves were fairly quivering with the strain, for it was to be his initial test.

He vanished from Harvey's sight later on, and joined the gathering group that had been detailed for active service on that particular occasion. It seemed that there was great need of information concerning certain matters, and the commander anticipated being able to learn what he wished if a few of the enemy could be brought in.

The promise of food, with plenty of tobacco, usually proved a sufficient inducement to open the lips of most of those thus captured; for as a rule they had long been denied such things, and the temptation overcame their scruples.

Besides Mart there were just five in the party, one of them being the veteran of previous successful raids, a private by the name of Wally Coon. Mart had discovered that Wally came from the backwoods of Maine, where he had acquired his remarkable skill in Indian habits, which proved very useful in trench raiding.

After considerable waiting and hoping that the plan had not been given up for any reason, the word came that they were to go over the top and start out upon that stretch lying between the lines of the hostile armies, which neither side dared claim as its own ground.

One by one the half dozen scrambled out of the trench. It was very thrilling to realize that at last they were starting toward the German front, shielded by the gloom of midnight.

Far away to the north the sky seemed to be lighted up as though some sort of action might be in progress there. Faintly to their ears came a strange grumble as of a mighty giant in mortal pain; but this they knew emanated from big guns in an artillery duel, each side having some object in view.

Once clear of the trench, they came together. A code of signals had of course been arranged, so that each member of the patrol knew what he must do when Mart gave a low whistle that might be mistaken by the enemy for the cheeping of a night bird, if noticed at all.

With Wally Coon close at his elbow Mart led the way. The other four crept along at their heels. Each man carried, besides his pistol and knife, a supply of powerful trench bombs, without which no patrol ever started forth.

Doubtless other patrols would be roaming over the open stretch at some place or other; they were just as apt to be Americans as Germans, and consequently there was a certain signal arranged by means of which friendly forces might be recognized before any hurling of the deadly bombs occurred.

Their method of procedure was very much like that which distinguished the American Indians when creeping up on some enemy. Each man was bent over almost double, and in this way they scurried along like great apes, every sense on the alert.

Should one of the German star-shells suddenly flame in the heavens above, the effect would be to cause a sudden cessation of movement. The man who had one foot elevated would hold it perfectly stiff in that position until once again the friendly darkness closed in about them.

It was bordering on the ridiculous, Mart thought, even while he recognized the absolute necessity for such action. He could remember watching children playing at exactly the same sort of game, every one becoming rigid in all sorts of grotesque attitudes, at a given signal.

Their course was at first almost directly toward the Hun line. Wally Coon and Mart had conferred and arranged the little plan of campaign which was now being carried out.

After going some distance and getting so near the hostile trenches that they could even hear the mutter of heavy voices close by, they changed their course and began to skirt the concrete line where the enemy had held out for so many months, defying attack.

Wally was looking for a certain "weak place." He had been out so often before that he seemed to know all about those opposition trenches, and just where they would be most likely to run across the intended victims of whom they were in search.

There were plenty of thrills attached to the enterprise. Sometimes they heard voices so distinctly

that it almost seemed as though the speakers must be within arms' length. Then again one of them would stumble over an unseen obstacle, and for the moment their hearts seemed to almost leap up into their throats with apprehension lest there come a gruff hail, to be followed by the rattle of a German-made gun.

So they finally came to the "weak spot" mentioned by Wally Coon. Their method of procedure was to hurl a few trench bombs which, on exploding a little further along, would induce a stampede among the defenders of the zigzag lines, those not killed or desperately injured wishing to get out of range before a second instalment of the missiles came over.

The rest of the American patrol would thereupon leap in and waylay a couple of the fleeing Huns, overpowering them and dragging them off.

To be sure there was always a chance that some of the comrades of the prisoners would recover from their alarm, and, gathering a force, set out in pursuit, intent on a rescue. This must be provided for. Sometimes quite a fierce hand-to-hand battle would result, the Germans in the trench close by being unable to make use of their machine-guns lest they mow down their own comrades.

Everything being arranged, Mart himself gave the signal for operations to begin. Two men had been sent on fifty feet or so to drop the bombs upon

an unsuspecting German, who was trying to take such comfort as he could find in those elaborately constructed concrete holes in the ground.

These two had been carefully coached as to the part they were to play. Both were resolute young chaps, with a disdain for anything in the way of danger. Indeed, every member of the detail had been selected chiefly for his boldness, as well as his ability to take care of himself if separated from his fellows.

Almost immediately after Mart had signalled, there came a blinding flash, accompanied by a stunning crash. The initial bomb had exploded, and must have sent a sudden thrill of apprehension through every German within hearing, since it might signify a general raid on their sector of the trenches for anything they knew.

Almost on the heels of the first smash a second detonation followed, with a third and fourth in rapid succession. The listening Yankees could hear loud outcries and other signs of a general panic. Wally Coon decided that the flight must now be on, and hence he nudged the sergeant to let him know the critical moment had arrived for their plunge into the enemy trench.

And so, as was his duty, Sergeant Mart himself started to show the way.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN THE PATROL RETURNED

"ZIP! Get 'em, boys!" was what Wally Coon was shouting.

He, at the same time, hurled one of his grenades some distance further along the line for the purpose of making the almost frantic occupants of the German trench recoil in their flight, under the impression that they were running into a second danger spot.

The four of them were now over the top and in the enemy trench, all of them yelling like mad. They could hear the alarmed Huns making off with all speed, doubtless under the impression that the whole American army must have started the long anticipated assault at last.

A number came rushing along, and Mart intercepted the nearest man, who happened to be much heavier than himself and objected to being dragged off in such a summary fashion. He fought like a tiger and Mart had a great time of it for a minute or so.

The German carried a gun with a bayonet at the end, and with this he kept trying to impale the

American before Mart managed to twine his arms about his neck. Wally Coon, coming up just then, soon made the fellow realize that he would continue his desperate struggles at his peril.

So the next thing Fritz did was to drop his gun, elevate both hands in the air, and bellow that one expressive word:

“Kamerad!”

Of course it was understood that this meant he surrendered unconditionally. Wally Coon, however, did not wholly trust the prisoner.

“I’ll search him, and see if he has a knife on his person,” he told Mart; and thereupon proceeded to do this in a clever fashion that would have aroused the admiration of a police sergeant at the station, accustomed to “frisking” suspects when arrested.

Meanwhile the other pair had also succeeded in subduing a running Hun, though it had taken some pounding to convince him he had no possible chance of eluding his fate.

Two prisoners would be amply sufficient for their purposes, if only they could rush them successfully across the open stretch and into the shelter of the American trenches.

The retreat was begun without any further attempt at terrifying the German trench holders, except that a few more bombs were dropped over. It seemed a pity to neglect such a “fat chance,” as

some of the boys called it. Besides, they hated to be compelled to carry so much of their load back with them, when it might be put to a good use.

Now the greatest danger arose. The racket had started the German gunners into sending up numerous star shells. These were bursting in rapid succession, and it required much manœuvring in order to avoid disaster.

Several times the raiders had to throw themselves flat on the ground when the machine-guns broke out with their deadly chatter. Bullets came whistling over them while they hugged the earth, and lucky the man who had found a shell-hole in which to cower.

Of course the Huns knew very well that one or more of their comrades had in all probability been carried off in the raid; but they seemed willing to sacrifice them in trying to wipe out the Americans. Perhaps they believed that at least this would prevent a "leak," for they must understand just why prisoners were wanted.

Dodging this way and that, Mart and his band succeeded in drawing further away from the enemy's line, though this in itself was no guaranty of additional safety, so closely related were the rival trenches.

Several of the party had been wounded, one man quite severely. Mart had handed his prisoner over to Wally Coon, and he now took it upon himself to

get this unfortunate comrade safely back to their own lines.

In order to do this it became necessary for him to carry the other, since his injury was in the right leg, so that he could not even hobble along.

Luckily Mart was big and strong. He took the other on his back as though he were but a child, and thus burdened the young sergeant ambled along with the rest between the bursting of the star-shells aloft.

Fortune favoured them, as it often does the brave. They finally managed to arrive at the nearest place along their own line. Their coming had evidently been eagerly anticipated, for friendly arms were ready to assist the wearied raiders and their prisoners into the "ditch."

They were just in time, too, for almost immediately afterwards the most vicious machine-gun fire broke out, and the place which they had so recently occupied was fairly riddled under the hurricane of bullets converging on that quarter.

After resting for a brief period, to recover their spent breath, Mart and his little band set out to deliver their report, as well as their prisoners, at the dugout representing local headquarters. The wounded man must also be taken care of at a dressing station, and afterwards transferred to the field hospital where his injury could be further attended to.

Mart was feeling particularly good, even though

he himself had received a slight but painful gunshot wound in his left arm, through which he had lost considerable blood.

He made his report, and was pleased to hear the major say:

"A most satisfactory raid, Sergeant. I congratulate you on your success. I shall detail you to accompany the wounded private to the field hospital, because I see that you too need some attention. After that you may seek your quarters, if the head surgeon decides that your injury is superficial."

Mart had no recourse but to obey orders, though he believed it was making too much of his mishap. He had wound his big bandanna around his arm, and thought Harvey, who was fairly clever about such things, might have fixed him up all right.

Nevertheless it turned out a very good thing for Mart, though at the time he had not dreamed of the surprise in store for him.

After they had given the private's injured leg first-aid treatment at the dressing station, so as to check the excessive bleeding, he and the sergeant were bundled into a waiting ambulance and driven off.

Mart had very little interest in his trip. The ambulance bumped along over the rough road and on through the darkness, since a light might have drawn the fire of the German gunners, who were

always on the lookout for any kind of moving target at which to send a few shells for practice, and also to intimidate the enemy.

Twice they left the road and made a detour. Mart understood why this had to be done, for he remembered seeing some of the numerous shell-holes dotting the shattered terrain in that sector. He also mentally pictured the great gaping hole in the road that he had gazed upon within half a mile of their recent camp, fully twenty miles back of the lines, where that enormous shell had landed just after the train of munition motor-trucks had swung by.

In this fashion they finally arrived at the field hospital. This was a long, low frame building, with the Red Cross painted boldly on the flat roof. Any enemy airman could see from a mile up, and know that by all the rules of recognized modern warfare and by The Hague convention he was debarred from dropping his bombs anywhere near by.

This humane rule had been frequently deliberately broken by the Germans, even as they had also found shallow excuses for sinking hospital vessels plainly marked as such, and bearing wounded men back to England. Doubtless it was a part of that "frightfulness" which seemingly had become the creed of the invaders of France and Belgium; a species of intended intimidation which, however, always had the opposite effect from what the Huns anticipated, in that it only served to arouse the an-

ger of French, British and Americans to fever heat.

Here Mart saw that his injured comrade was taken care of. The poor lad had borne up splendidly, and never a groan had come from his lips.

"Thank you for all you've done for me, Sergeant," he said, extending his hand to Mart, as the latter was about to turn away after having seen that the surgeon was ready to begin work.

Turning to this latter the soldier went on to say enthusiastically:

"He's a trump, Doctor, that's what he is! When I was struck on a patrol raid out in No-Man's-Land he picked me up, and toted me in on his back as if I were a big baby. I hope Sergeant Dorr lives to be a major, for he's as brave as they make them."

"Fine work, Sergeant," said the surgeon. "But before you go back to your post you must have that arm looked after or blood poisoning may set in. While I'm busy here suppose you step over into that smaller dormitory, and have the attending nurse take care of it. If it requires more extensive treatment than she can give have her call me after I'm through here."

Accordingly Mart, being a soldier who had learned to obey orders unquestioningly, stepped over and entered the second apartment of the rough building used for a hospital.

There were several rows of cots, most of them filled with patients, for it was only at stated inter-

vals the ambulances ran back to base hospitals in cities far in the rear. Consequently wounded and sick men accumulated here until a clearing-out time arrived, when many of the cots would be vacated. Sometimes there also came a vacancy when a poor fellow died.

A single nurse was bending over a little table close by, arranging some medicines and bandages. Mart wondered if she could have heard those cordial words of praise uttered by the grateful fellow whom he had carried off the field, after they had been subjected to that hail of machine-gun bullets. He felt a flush pass over him at the thought of having his praises sung in the hearing of another, for Mart was as modest as he was brave.

"The surgeon sent me here to have my arm bandaged, if you please, Nurse," he managed to say, as he came closer.

At that she looked up. It was Lucille Maillard into whose face Mart gazed!

"Mart, how strange that we should meet here, of all places!" she exclaimed, her face looking prettier than ever Mart thought, now that she blushed and her eyes sparkled with genuine pleasure.

"And to think that I felt it was foolish of my major to order me to have my arm attended to when I accompanied my comrade to the hospital!" was the thought in Mart's mind, as he gladly clasped Lucille's hand.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RED CROSS NURSE

BUT you are wounded, Mart!" exclaimed Lucille, hastily, and she shuddered a little upon catching sight of the red bandanna he had wrapped around his left arm.

"Oh, a mere scratch, believe me, Lucille," he told her, modestly.

"Still it ought to be looked after," Lucille went on to say, decidedly, with the spirit of an army nurse aroused. "I heard Doctor Murray say as much. There's no telling what follows even a slight wound, with those malicious Huns using their poisons so freely."

There was no way out of it, and so Mart felt compelled to take off his coat, and roll up his discoloured woollen shirt-sleeve. He did so with evident reluctance apparently, and Lucille chided him for it.

"You forget, Mart," she told him, "that I've been doing this duty for months and months, most of the time in a Paris hospital, but more recently over here back of our own lines. I'm fully experienced now, and the head surgeon compliments me very highly."

"I can easily believe that," muttered Mart, and Lucille, having heard the words, bent lower over his arm and blushed with pleasure.

The wound was superficial, just as Mart had said. He felt considerably relieved upon making certain of that fact, for a vague alarm had taken possession of him that after all this impatient waiting as the summer drew on for action to begin, he might have to be retired for a time in order to recuperate. And that he believed would almost break his heart.

The two friends chatted as Lucille's deft fingers first washed the cut with warm water in which a disinfectant had been placed, and then proceeded to bandage it neatly.

Apparently she could not have been overwhelmed with a rush of business at that hour of the night, if one could judge from the deliberate way in which she went about her task. But then they were old boy and girl chums, who had not seen each other for a long time, during which so many great events in the history of the human race had come to pass.

Finally the operation seemed to have been concluded; or at least Lucille was unable to find any further excuse for continuing the pleasant chat. So she patted his bandaged arm, and drew down his shirt-sleeve, even helping him on with his coat, to which Mart did not object very much.

"Why, any one would think, Lucille," he re-

marked, laughingly, "that I had been jabbed with one of those Hun bayonets, and run up against a dose of shrapnel in the bargain. Please don't make me out a sissy."

"You must come back again some time tomorrow afternoon or night and have it dressed again," she told him, assuming a stern air, as though she meant to be obeyed.

"To be sure I'd like to, Lucille," he replied, quickly. "But is it necessary? I'd have to tell the captain the surgeon said so, you know."

"Well, I say so for Doctor Murray then," she remarked, boldly. "And your captain can be glad that he hasn't had one of his men laid up in the hospital. When you come, you'll ask for me, of course, Mart?"

"I certainly will, Lucille, because this is your job. But it's such a little thing I'm nearly ashamed to come."

"The nurse knows best in such cases, Mart. Remember, I'll expect you and be sure and tell Tom," were her parting words, as Mart held out his hand and squeezed her fingers — well, with that flood of happy remembrances crowding into his mind there on the fighting line in France, how could he have done otherwise?

Several times, as he made his way back to the trenches by the zigzag path he knew so well by this time, he might have been seen to pat his arm softly

and chuckle. Indeed, one might almost suspect Mart was glad he had been wounded in that raid on the German trenches, since it had brought him in contact with such an old friend, and given him half an hour of such pleasure.

When he came across Harvey the latter was off duty, but wide-awake. Somehow the boy seemed to be aware of the fact that the patrol had returned, though he had so far seen none of the others. The continued absence of his cousin was filling him with alarm as he pictured Mart lying out in a shell-hole in No-Man's-Land, wounded, it might even be, dead; or if not that, a prisoner of the implacable Huns, and doomed to suffering through hunger and exposure.

This being the case Harvey was greatly rejoiced to see his cousin once more, though he quickly took note of the bandaged arm.

"I feared you'd been hurt," he told him, solicitously touching the arm Mart had tried to conceal from him.

"Oh, shucks! it's only a scratch, Harvey," objected the other.

"All very well for you to say that," Harvey went on, "for you always were a great hand to fake being well when you had all you could do to hold your head up. They made you go to the hospital, I think, because your arm is done up so neatly."

Mart chuckled, somewhat to his cousin's surprise.

"She took quite a little time doing it up," he explained. "And I tell you she's the boss little army nurse."

"Hello!" ejaculated Harvey, "what's this you're saying, Mart? Run across a little French nurse whose smiles have made you forget the girls back home, have you?"

"This one bore the name of Lucille!" came the astonishing explanation.

"Our Lucille, do you mean?" exclaimed Harvey; and then Mart had to tell how much astonished he had been to run across Tom's sister there in the hospital several miles back of the front.

"That'll be great news to Tom!" declared the listener. "He was saying only the other day that it had been a mighty long time since last he'd heard from Lucille. Strange things do happen once in a while, don't they, even here where the bullets are flying, and poison gas fills the air every time Heine feels particularly vicious?"

In the morning Mart waited impatiently for Lieutenant Tom to appear; for belonging to the same company as they did they often came in contact, although of course their relations had as a rule to be only such as could be countenanced between a commissioned officer and a non-commissioned one.

Finally his chance came, when he saw Tom making the rounds of that sector of the trench; and after saluting, as required by army regulations, and being

spoken to by Tom, Mart purposely allowed his bandaged arm to be discovered. Just as he expected Tom gave a low exclamation.

"Then you did get up against it last night in that trench raid, Mart?" he observed, intensely interested. "I heard of your terse report to the commanding officer, and that your patrol had brought in two prisoners. He also informed me that you had carried a wounded companion most of the way on your back. The major was full of praise for your grit, and let me tell you it made me feel proud."

"He insisted that I go along with the poor chap to the hospital, and so I sat beside the driver of the ambulance," Mart went on to explain. "Well, I was glad after all I had gone, because the nurse who bound up my arm like this turned out to be a dear friend of mine."

"Not Lucille, Mart?" cried Tom, his face lighting up with eagerness.

"Just who it was, Lieutenant," came the quick answer. "She wants to see you right away, and I've got to get permission to return this afternoon, because you see, there's always some danger from even these scratches, when they come from German bullets or bayonets."

"That's glorious news you're telling me, Mart!" continued Tom Maillard.

"I thought about the same way," admitted Mart, frankly.

"And is Lucille quite well?" added the other.

"Never saw her look better, or prettier, if you'll excuse me for saying it, Lieutenant," spoke up Mart, boldly. "And let me tell you she's the boss hand at doing up a wound; and so *very* careful. I guess I was there all of half an hour. But then how our tongues did rattle, for she wanted to know everything that had happened since we landed in France, and I felt the same way about Lucille."

"She's a noble girl," asserted Tom.

"Doing her duty as many an American girl is today in Red Cross work, or serving in the canteens of the Y. M. C. A.," added Mart, proudly. "But across the sea hundreds of thousands of our girls and women, millions of 'em I ought to say, are doing their bit by knitting sweaters and helmets and socks or else in all sorts of other ways showing the brothers at the front they mean to back 'em up. Yes, we're proud of them all, that's right."

"I must get over and see Lucille right away, if I can be spared," Tom went on to say. "To think that she's been so near our last camp all the while we've been there, and I didn't suspect it. But from now on I'll hope to see more of my splendid sister."

"And say, I hope this scratch of mine shows just the least sign of trouble, nothing serious, of course, but needing attention once a day for a week or so," chuckled Mart, at which Tom gave him a malicious wink and, turning, walked away with bent head so

that he might not invite a shot from some German marksman who was eager to open fire with his machine-gun from the enemy trenches across the open ground.

Mart of course received permission to leave the trenches by the circuitous path that was hidden by brush and some clever camouflage work. As a rule entry and exit could only be made at night, for a file of moving men was apt to invite a shower of shells.

And this pleasant duty kept up for yet another day, much to Mart's pleasure. He regretted that their time in the trenches had come to an end, for it was hardly likely that he could continue his visits to the hospital, once they were back in their old camp.

Harvey wormed out everything that had happened on that night raid to the German trenches. When Mart tried to obscure his own part his cousin demanded the facts, and threatened to get them from one of the other raiders if Mart remained obdurate.

"Now it would be only right," he said at one time when he had made the other confess that he had carried the wounded man most of the way back, determined that he should not fall into the hands of the Huns, "if they gave you the War Cross for such a brave feat. Others have gotten it for doing things not nearly so gallant."

But Mart shook his head modestly as he hastily said:

“Oh, that wasn’t anything worth speaking about, Harvey. He was only a little runt, you see, and I carried him ever so easy. I’m satisfied with what our major said to me.”

CHAPTER XX

OVER THE TOP

SUMMER had come and gone. It was now well into September, and the men of the First Army were as impatient as hounds scenting game, yet held in the leash by their master.

Events of vast importance were daily happening. Ludendorff had long since loosed his great offensive, and by repeated overwhelming rushes borne both the French and British back mile after mile.

But they fought well, did the Allies, even though their numbers were inferior to the enemy masses that burst upon them like an avalanche; the French with the old indomitable valour of Napoleon's time, and the sons of Britain with their accustomed bulldog tenacity and grit.

Never a rod of ground had been surrendered but the Huns had to pay an enormous price for it. It was only a question of how long they could keep this sacrifice up, for their reserves were melting away at a frightful rate.

Then came Foch, recently placed in charge of all the Allied forces as a supreme commander. Great things were expected of this master strategist,

who had already proved himself equal to the greatest test.

It had been a time of rejoicing when the news reached camp that at Château Thierry, down below Verdun, the gallant American marines had not only held the line against the assault of the Germans, but actually forced the enemy backward.

What a thrill that news gave every one in the camp when it was carried around! Cheers arose that might have been heard miles away. Every soldier felt it in his bones that the day had dawned at last when America was to show what she could do in the way of fighting an independent battle.

"We're going to get in the scrap now!" cried Harvey, exultantly, as he shook hands with his cousin, his young face wreathed with smiles.

They were doing that all over the camp, just as you have probably seen men hugging each other in the excess of their mad joy at some hotly contested baseball match, when, after everything seemed lost for the home team, one player knocks out a base-hit, a second draws a pass, and then the weakest batter of all actually swats the ball for a home-run, causing the crowd to act as though every one in it had gone crazy.

The news grew better day by day.

Not only had the marines held the Huns, but when the Americans started to attack they carried everything before them. At last the backbone of

Ludendorff's tremendous drive had been broken, the Huns were in retreat, and it was American regiments that turned the tide.

Days passed, and still there was no sign of a forward movement at the sector where Mart and Harvey and their battalion lay in camp.

"Oh! why don't we get busy, and do our share?" Harvey said again and again; but Mart took things less to heart.

"In good time it's going to come our way, Harvey. Before September ends we shall be wading in. Tom hasn't told me anything, but between the lines of his talk, and his being so busy just now with our training I can read that any day the order is likely to come for us to jump off and go over the top!"

"I wish it was here now, that's right!" fretted the other. "We've just got to chase Heine out of that big Argonne Forest, they say, and it's going to be some job, I take it."

"Yes, because their method of fighting now is to use thousands of machine-guns to hold the Allies back," Mart explained. "They make regular nests of them, and can mow down a whole regiment. Why, I've been told that in places two Huns will hide in a big tree with a machine-gun, and wait for a chance to open on a battalion passing close by."

"Yes," Harvey added angrily, "and I've also been told that after doing all the damage they can,

killing dozens, and wounding lots more, when they've used up all their ammunition those Huns will jump in sight with both hands above their heads yelling 'kamerad!' at the top of their voices, and expect to be spared! I've heard some of the boys say what *they* mean to do."

"Well, don't tell it to me, then," warned the sergeant; "for it's none of my business, and if I knew I might think it my duty to report it, and I shouldn't want to. Every man has to be his own judge about taking prisoners, you understand."

"What's this I hear about General Pershing being near by?" continued Harvey.

"I guess it's true," the other assured him. "Fact is, Tom told me we'd be apt to get a glimpse of our general today. And listen, even while we're talking the boys at the extreme right have started to yell like wild Indians!"

"I wouldn't be surprised if Pershing has come!" cried Harvey, as both of them started to run in that direction.

Indeed, the whole camp was soon in a turmoil. The cheers that were sounding must have gone straight to the heart of the soldierly looking man in khaki who, accompanied by his staff, rode through the camp waving his hand right and left to the wildly shouting crowds.

They knew what the coming of Pershing signified. The hour was close at hand for their partici-

pation in the fight, and the master wished to see with his own eyes that all was in readiness for the blow.

The Germans knew something was impending, for their air scouts must have often brought in news of the gathering of Yankee forces, with their artillery, and everything needful for an arduous campaign.

It was now the second day after that visit of Pershing's, and a thrill passed through the camp, a shiver of expectancy that approached ecstatic delight.

"We're going over tonight I do believe, Mart!" exclaimed Harvey, at just four in the afternoon, when the order was passing around for every one to get himself in readiness for abandoning the comfortable camp, with the idea that he would never see it again.

"Looks that way," agreed the sergeant. "This order can mean nothing else, when you stop to think of it. Yes, we're going in at last."

"And we'll soon be on the road to Berlin!" added Harvey, joyously; for he could think only of the glory of battle, and the wonderful thrill that victory would bring in its train.

When nightfall came their preparations were complete. Supper, the last they would eat in peace for a long, long time, was over now, and they only waited for the command to move out.

Of course they would go forward to the trenches by detachments, so as to run less chance of having the movement observed. The Germans were apparently very nervous on this night, for they were sending up an unusual number of star-shells and evidently keeping a close watch for signs that would tell the story.

Fortunately the order came before night had set in more than an hour. It would be moonlight, though clouds promised to obscure occasionally the bright glow of the heavenly luminary.

Silently Tom's company fell in, and under the lead of the captain and his officers started forward in the direction of the trenches. There was no talking allowed, though possibly some excited lad might manage to exchange whispers with a comrade touching elbows with him.

Star-shells were breaking every few minutes ahead and back of the front line, proving that the enemy was suspicious concerning what was going on and meant to do everything possible to prevent the attack from catching him unawares.

It was very exciting. Although they would never have confessed it, doubtless every soldier's heart was pounding tumultuously against his ribs as he realized that the critical hour, for which he had been yearning ever so long, had finally arrived, and he was about to come to grips with that cruel foe of whom he had heard so many terrible things said.

Great care was observed in making their way into the trenches. Could the enemy have learned what was taking place the German guns would have put down a barrage, so that the movement would have to be given up, for that particular night at least, and this would have sadly disarranged the plans of General Pétain.

But in the end the entire battalion had been brought in. Other regiments occupied more remote parts of the line, and tens of thousands of eager young American fighters nervously gripped their guns, waiting to be sent over the top.

The excitement of battle was in their veins, and few gave a thought to the possibility that before another sunset some of them would certainly have passed into another world, or have been taken painfully wounded to the rear. Soldiers who have steeled themselves to do their duty regardless of personal danger give but little heed to such things.

The night dragged on. Some of the waiting troops dozed in their cramped positions, but few secured any real sleep.

It was well on toward dawn before the thrilling word came. Instantly every heart leaped madly as the fighters nerved themselves for the plunge. Once over the top, they must be governed by the rules they had practised so long. It was understood to be "every man for himself," though the members of the battalion would of course keep con-

stantly in touch with one another, and be ready to obey orders given by signal.

The moon still shone, but the morning mist was heavy all around. They expected to lose some of their number in passing over the intervening stretch, but the enemy trenches once gained, the stern business of war would demand their strict attention.

Then at the word, swiftly, in batches of half a dozen, the men clambered out of the trench, and started to scuttle along toward the German lines. The great attack ordered by Pétain and Pershing was on!

CHAPTER XXI

THE MACHINE-GUN NESTS

ALREADY the Germans had discovered what was taking place, and they opened with machine-guns and field artillery. Shells began to burst here, there, and everywhere. From certain sectors the spiteful rattle of the rapid-fire pieces sounded like the scolding of some angry woman.

Harvey lost track of his cousin as soon as they were free from the trench. He found himself keeping beside another member of his company, ducking and dodging, but always making headway in the direction of their intended goal.

The queer singing of bullets passing overhead was a new experience, but somehow it did not seem to appal Harvey in the least. He fell several times in his haste to get over the uneven ground, long since ploughed up by plunging missiles, and with yawning shell-holes every little distance.

They were now approaching the hostile trenches, where it might be expected they would find a host of helmeted Germans awaiting their coming with bayonets upraised and trench bombs held ready to give them a warm reception.

"There's a nasty machine-gun working away just over here to our left," the lad at his elbow said. "It's doing lots of hurt to our boys. Let's wipe the nest out, Harvey!"

The idea appealed to the imagination of the boy. Here lay a chance to strike his first blow for the great cause.

"I fall for it, Dick!" he announced. "Let's creep into this shell-hole and perhaps there's another just further on. That'd bring us close up to the bastion where that chap keeps busy."

"We could drop in on him from one side, you see," suggested Dick, who was a long-legged boy from some town in northern New York, and evidently quite at home in woods tactics, judging from his actions, as Harvey had decided before then.

They crawled forward. Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose all about that section. Harvey had never heard a greater racket, and it added to the excitement to realize that deadly missiles of every description were being hurled at them by the now thoroughly aroused foe.

Whenever the fire seemed to grow especially vicious the pair would flatten themselves on the ground until it became calmer once more, when their forward progress could be resumed. On hands and knees they thus advanced. The bastion from which the machine-gun continued at intervals to pour out its dangerous torrent of bullets was close by.

Harvey's quick eye had discovered a way of enfilading the Hun marksman's hiding place; and in this manner they would be able to "shoot up" the nest. He drew his companion along with him, and a minute later they cautiously took a survey.

A dark object lay secreted in the shadows. A second lay flat and motionless on the ground. Just then there came a series of bright flashes, accompanied by the coughing of the gun in staccato waves. Sure of their quarry now, the two Americans levelled their guns and fired point blank. That machine-gun was silenced for good. Harvey and Dick Rouse could see the gunner scrambling around on the ground as though badly wounded, and heard his loud cries of, "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

Not wanting to be bothered with a prisoner thus early in the attack, and a wounded one in the bargain, neither of the boys paid any attention to his outcries. It was enough for them to know he would not be apt to do any further injury to their comrades.

They were now in the enemy trench, but considerably to their surprise it was to meet with almost no opposition. Apparently the Germans in anticipation of this forward rush on the part of the Yankees had left only a comparatively few men armed with machine-guns to defend the trenches, and had withdrawn their main forces to a second line further back.

Already some of the boldest spirits had passed beyond and were moving up the rise, bent on coming to grips with the enemy if they had to go five miles in order to do it. And Harvey, still accompanied by Dick Rouse, was of course only too willing to follow their lead.

All along the line this same thing was taking place. The Americans, angry because they had been tricked by the wary enemy, began to push straight on, bent on reaching their objectives early in that day's rush.

They were now pushing through scrub, and all around them other forms might be seen heading upward. Above them the enemy waited, ready to dispute their progress with poison gas, machine-guns, and finally the bare bayonet. It mattered nothing to those boys from across the sea. They had awaited this hour too long to let danger daunt their bold spirits.

So they struck the German line, and the fighting became general. Shots and shouts arose in every direction. In the grey mist that heralded the coming of dawn the battle was joined; and under the impetuous rush of the Yankee fighters the Germans were borne backward, yielding ground, stubbornly at first, and then with more celerity.

Once imbued with the excitement of battle, the charging battalion acted after the manner of so many hundred wild men. They whooped like cow-

boys, or painted Indians, and no doubt filled many a Teuton breast with apprehension; for certainly those men of the Kaiser had never before faced such energetic fighters as the khaki-clad soldiers from the Western World proved to be.

Harvey ran across his cousin Mart in the heat of the engagement. He was just in time to see the sergeant bowl over a rash German who had ventured to dispute his passage through the wood. To the astonishment as well as amusement, of Harvey the sergeant stooped over long enough to pick up the spiked helmet of the Prussian, which he then fastened to his belt.

"Been wanting one of these a long time now for a souvenir!" he explained to Harvey, who became imbued with a similar desire, which he decided to satisfy at the earliest favourable opportunity.

Similar scenes were being enacted all along the line, for American boys have always had a liking for keepsakes that would revive pleasant recollections in time to come. Helmets and every kind of Hun trophy would be carried off by the cartload, to be later on sent by parcel post, if allowable, to those at home, to show what "the boy" was doing over in France.

"Where do we go from here, Mart?" demanded Harvey, pausing to recover his breath, at the same time smiling to note that his cousin's victim was now sitting up, and rubbing the crown of his head,

as though it felt sore after contact with the butt of an American gun.

"Oh, straight along!" came the reply. "Our objective lies a mile and more ahead, somewhere in the forest. We'll have to wipe out a whole bunch of those nasty machine-gun nests before we pull up for the day."

"Some of our boys are down back yonder, Mart!"

"I know that," came the reply as the sergeant looked particularly fierce. "Joe Sutherland dropped right alongside me, and I'm afraid the poor chap is done for. One of those fellows in a tree got him; but I had the boys train their guns on the place, and we knocked him out of his perch quicker than a frog could jump from a log."

"Served the sneak right!" snapped Harvey, indignantly; although he must have known that the Germans who thus stayed behind to delay the rush of the enemy, often at the sacrifice of their own lives, at least could not be called cowards.

They wasted no more time in talking, for both had managed to recover their breath and felt ready for another forward push. It was now full daylight, although the friendly mist still clung to the surface of the earth, and did more or less service in hiding the movements of the American assailants.

Slowly but steadily they were advancing, the Germans giving way before them in many places. It

was plain to be seen the Teutons had no stomach for making a desperate stand. Their tactics consisted for the most part in planting myriads of machine-gun detachments along the line; just as a fleeing submarine might drop floating mines overboard in hope of destroying one or more of the pursuing warships.

This holding up of the attacking force allowed the Germans enough time to get their heavy guns moved further back, which was mainly the reason for sacrificing so many of their best men.

In one place some of the Americans had a sickening shock. A German had been using his weapon freely, but was caught unawares by some of the assailants, who took him on the flank, and was fairly smothered by their fire and fell beside the gun he had so lately manipulated. The first American to reach him chanced to be Mart, though Harvey was close at his heels. The latter took one look at the dead German, then gave a cry.

"Why, would you believe me, Mart! he's chained himself to his machine-gun," he exclaimed. "What could have tempted him to do such a crazy thing as that, do you know?"

"He didn't," said the sergeant, who could see further into a mystery than Harvey ever was able to do. "They chained him here to make sure he couldn't run away. You see their method of fight-

ing is different from the sort the Allies and the American soldiers follow, and which makes our men able to take the initiative."

"Yes, I know," admitted Harvey, "the Fritzies must feel contact with the next man in battle to fight well. When a German finds himself alone he gets scared and is ready to throw up the sponge, while in a bunch they will hold out till next to the last man goes down. But the final man, they say, always gives in at the pinch."

They had heard of such a thing before, but now the fact was proved without question; and if asked they could say they had seen it with their own eyes.

"Forward still!" called out Tom, as others came trooping after them. "Our objective lies beyond us. Keep the ball rolling, boys! Hit hard and straight from the shoulder!"

A husky cheer greeted these words, and again the line went on. But the nerve-racking machine-gun pest grew more and more serious. The German gunners seemed to be in every nook and corner of the woods, and the spiteful crash of their weapons greeted the Americans on every hand.

One gunner in particular, posted advantageously in a thick tree, seemed capable of holding up the entire line with his deadly fire. Tom knew that unless they could dispose of him they were apt to be detained indefinitely.

"Where's Big Bill Hicksley?" he called out.
"We need some one who can shoot a bull's-eye every time! Hello! Big Bill, step forward!"

And accordingly Harvey's old tormentor came lounging up with a leer and a swagger.

"Here I am, Lieutenant," he said, indifferently;
"what's wanted of me?"

CHAPTER XXII

AT BAY IN THE ARGONNE FOREST

“WE need that eagle eye of yours, Private Hicksley,” said the lieutenant grimly. “That Fritz posted over yonder in the big tree commands every path ahead of us. We can’t advance ten feet because of the rain of lead he lets loose. Twice now he’s thrown us back. Can you get him, Hicksley?”

“Count on me, sir,” came the prompt reply, and Big Bill shot a proud look around, as much as to ask those who had heretofore so thoroughly detested him as the bully of the camp to notice that he was at last coming into his own.

He took one good look, and then ambled off. No one dared ask him where he was going; somehow or other they seemed to understand that in this crisis Big Bill, bully though he had always been, with so many mean traits sticking out on all sides, might be depended on, for he was at least a “cracking good soldier.”

“Count on me, sir!”

There was a confidence in those few words that went for much. Big Bill did not waste his breath

in boasting, at least; he evidently believed in letting deeds take the place of speech.

They watched him until, as he crawled stealthily forward, the scanty undergrowth concealed his bulky form from view. Minutes passed. Tom was observing that offensive tree. He had an idea the hidden occupant would meet with an unpleasant surprise before a great while.

To the right and to the left they could hear other machine-guns barking in many different keys as the various nests were being prodded by the advancing Americans. Many were the plans used to clean them out, and usually with very fair success.

Had it been in open ground the best method would have been, as Harvey told the soldier at his right elbow, to "sick the tanks on 'em." That meant that one or more of the armoured tractors would start ahead, and either roll completely over the depression where the German gunners crouched, flattening men and guns out like "pancakes," or else deluging their position with a hurricane fire that must accomplish the same end, and clear the way for the advancing infantry.

"I believe I can make out just where that Hun is perched," Harvey observed a little later. "See where the thick bunch of leaves makes a bulge? Well, he's in that spot; and I presume depending on some sort of bullet-proof plate connected with his machine-gun to ward off our fire. But all the same,

he doesn't count on any one's creeping around to outflank him."

Even as Harvey finished speaking they saw a commotion amidst the foliage of the big tree. Then something came toppling down.

"Big Bill got him! Bully for Bill!" one man exclaimed in his excitement.

At a command from the lieutenant who was in charge of that sector they ran forward. No whirring series of shots greeted them from the elevated fortress, which was eloquent evidence in itself that the Yankee sharpshooter's quest had not been in vain.

The way was clear for a further advance. One of the men climbing into the tree, toppled down the troublesome machine-gun that had held them up so long.

Big Bill Hicksley accepted the plaudits of his fellows with a pleased grin decorating his red face. Harvey, eyeing his former tormentor out of the tail of his eye, remarked to Mart, who chanced to come up just then:

"He certainly did the business all right, Bill did. And right now, when that proud look is on his face, why, honestly, Mart, he seems almost human!"

The Americans continued to press forward. Now and then other obstacles arose to check their progress, but they would not be denied, and kept steadily moving ahead, leaving many an example

behind them of how Yankee fighters meet trouble and conquer it.

In the end their objective was gained, and that section of the advance paused. To overrun the limit given them to be attained would be worse than not reaching the goal, since it must be judged reckless disobedience of orders.

Doubtless other parts of the line had met with stronger opposition and still at the close of that day of furious fighting were some distance in the rear.

When morning came the troops would receive fresh orders and be ready to start again; for sooner or later it was determined that the last German machine gunner must be overcome, or chased out of the Argonne Forest.

The boys would not be likely to forget that night after their initial taste of actual warfare. They had lost some of their number, while others were wounded and had to be sent back, or else taken care of on the spot. It was no peaceful night to many of the battalion. Signal Corps men were busily laying a connecting wire with headquarters so that those at the front might always keep in touch with the High Command, and notify the general of the measure of success falling to their lot.

Through the heavy growth men with stretchers, and wearing the insignia of the Red Cross, wended their way, carrying out the injured to a road, there

to be met by ambulances that could not enter the forest itself.

Fresh ammunition was coming forward, as well as other supplies which were needed by the exhausted troops, who had fought gallantly and had given so good an account of themselves.

Harvey had not received a single scratch, though many times hearing the vicious patter of bullets splashing against the tree-trunks around him, as he chanced to come within range of some concealed gunner. Two of his most intimate friends had fallen, one killed, he feared, and the other seriously wounded. All this made the boy feel for the first time what real war was. He had undergone his baptism of fire.

Precautions were taken to guard against a surprise attack. None came, however, and after breakfast the order was given to move out once more, as their big job had hardly been more than started.

With the new day operations were taken up just where they had been discontinued on the preceding afternoon. The enemy was found thicker than ever. Indeed, it seemed as though there must be a gunner behind every possible hiding place, always equipped with a German-made machine calculated to sprinkle the woods in front and on both sides with leaden spray, even as Harvey remembered often using the garden hose at home.

Every rod of gain had to be won at a consider-

able cost of time, ammunition, and frequently the loss of some of their number. The only satisfaction they had was that they were effectively cleaning up the forest as they waded through it, leaving not a single live enemy behind them.

It chanced that a small part of the line managed to push ahead much faster than the rest. This sector comprised the company of which the trio of young friends were members. The whole battalion had made progress, in fact, and held the apex of the advance when the day closed, and night came on.

They knew they were in a position of considerable danger. The enemy appeared to be in great force on either flank, and on this account the battalion instead of holding the former thin line was gathered in a dense formation that could be better defended in case a hostile envelopment were attempted during the night.

The members of the battalion were worn out with the exciting events of that second day. They had, temporarily, it was to be hoped, lost touch with their fellows on either side, and seemed to be alone in the midst of the enemy ground.

"Chances are," Harvey predicted, again speaking to Dick Rouse, "that we'll be attacked tonight. If that does come along, believe me there's going to be some tall fighting."

"This miserable haze that's settled down will

allow the Heinies to crawl up on us much more easily," added the other lad, gloomily.

Dick had received a painful, though not necessarily serious, wound, in reality escaping with his life by a narrow margin. He cared little or nothing for the pain, but was afraid lest his limp might cause him to fall behind the rest at some time or other and thus be taken prisoner.

"And," he privately informed Harvey when speaking of the matter, "I honestly believe I'd sooner be killed outright than fall into the hands of those Huns, after all the terrible stories I've heard of how they treat the British in their prison camps."

"Well," Harvey had remarked confidentially, "I have some friends I think a heap of who are, so far as we know, held in a German prison camp; and as I lie awake at night I often feel a heaviness about my heart when I get to thinking of what they may be suffering."

"Mighty little supper we had tonight," continued Dick, who was in a complaining mood.

"Unless we run across some supplies tomorrow," Harvey told him, "there's a pretty good chance we won't get a single bite of supper the next time."

"Looks to me as if we'd either got away ahead of our objective, or else the rest of the crowd has been held back," Dick continued. "I wonder if we'll get an order to fall back in the morning?"

"With the major we've got at the head of this

battalion, such a thing as retreat will not come in a hurry," Harvey enthusiastically predicted. "For my part, I believe he'll be more apt to push ahead and cut right through the enemy."

"Anyhow," added Dick, lowering his voice so he might not be by any chance overheard, "it's my opinion we're lost right now in this miserable forest, where the best of woodmen might be puzzled to know which way to turn."

"Our officers have been in consultation," Harvey admitted, "because I've seen Lieutenant Maillard hurrying up bearing some sort of rough chart, as if they meant to consult it for tomorrow's guidance. But why should we worry? Leave all that to them."

The mist grew heavier as the long night wore on; but contrary to the expectation of Dick the enemy did not see fit to force the issue, in that there was no attack. Occasionally a few bullets would drop in the camp, sent from a distance likely enough; and once they heard the sound of heavy firing in the far distance, of which they could make nothing at all.

So the night passed, and the third day found them.

It was a cheerless morning, made doubly so by the fact that the fighters had only the prospect of a make-believe breakfast, as Harvey called it, ahead of them. A cup of black coffee and a single wedge

of hardtack taken from their packs hardly filled their stomachs; in fact, it seemed only to further excite the pangs of hunger with those hardy young lads.

They showed the right sort of spirit, however, tightening their belts, and joking with one another over the predicament in which they found themselves. And later on when the word went around to start again they threw themselves into their work of mopping up the machine-gun nests of the Huns as though they had enjoyed a most bountiful meal.

Instead of improving the weather grew more and more miserable. The forest aisles were so filled with mists that it became necessary to close up ranks tighter in order to keep from straying.

This sort of thing was very much in favour of the enemy, who did not hesitate to take advantage of it. Toward noon the battalion found itself engaged in what gave promise of becoming a terrific battle. Even a battery of light field-pieces was employed against the Americans.

An hour passed, and the situation was becoming desperate. The commander of the German forces had sent in an officer with a flag of truce, demanding immediate surrender, and informing the Americans that they were entirely cut off from all their comrades, so that their case seemed utterly hopeless.

"Tell your colonel," replied the major, brusquely, in reply, "that we are Americans, and that we pur-

pose to fight it out on this line if it takes all fall and winter. Surrender nothing! Why, we've just begun to fight!" (See Note 8.)

As the afternoon wore on the battle raged more stubbornly than ever. Having thrown up some sort of rude intrenchments the Yankees were giving of their best whenever the enemy tried to rush their line. Several times had they thrown the German forces back with heavy losses; but the field guns promised to play havoc in the ranks of those at bay.

"Sergeant Dorr, you are ordered," said a lieutenant to Mart, "to take a file of the best marksmen, and silence those guns at any cost!"

CHAPTER XXIII

OBEYING ORDERS

MART took it as a signal honour in that of all the sergeants he should have been picked out to command the detachment to whose charge this important task was committed.

He was to have just three men besides himself, and of course they must be some of the best marksmen in the company. Mart knew that first of all Big Bill Hicksley would be chosen. Then there was a boy by the name of Parsons who had always shown a remarkable ability in attaining a high score at the targets when on the range. Last of all came an older man named Boggs, who had once been a guide in the woods at home, and thus handled a rifle from the time, as he always declared, he "was knee-high to a duck."

They laid in an extra amount of ammunition for their guns, and then on being given the order moved away. Mart had located the quarter where the troublesome field battery seemed to be posted. It could not be at a very great distance, for the shells were dropping more and more accurately on the sector occupied by the Americans. This showed that the gunners had obtained their range perfectly, and

that the intervening trees were considered no obstacle.

The sergeant had also figured on his probable course in endeavouring to reach the rear of the enemy battery. In so doing he had to be guided by many things, in which the possibility of concealing themselves stood at the head.

Harvey had felt very much chagrined at not being able to be a member of the squad that went forth to carry out the desperate order. He knew, however, that those chosen had a much higher percentage of marksmanship than he had ever been able to attain, and were thus better qualified for the task set before them.

As the Germans were everywhere in force it promised to be a most difficult thing to make the advance without discovery. But Mart had noted a nearby ravine that seemed to promise more or less hope. He took his three sharpshooters into this depression; and so they moved along.

Just as Mart anticipated, the ravine twisted and turned very much after the manner of a snake; but its general direction favoured his plans. Besides, every rod placed behind them meant that they must be drawing closer to the bothersome battery. Indeed, their ears told them this well enough, for the firing continued to grow more and more distinct.

One possibility kept Mart on the anxious seat. This was the chance that the ravine might appeal

to some of the enemy just as it had to them. Should they come face to face with a detachment of Hun sharpshooters striving to creep up on the flank of the battalion the situation promised to be lively enough; and as one of the men whispered to his comrade, "it would be a case of dog eat dog." Worst of all, Mart's plans would be sadly disarranged. So he continued to hope nothing of the kind would happen.

But the further they drew away from the position occupied by their comrades the more their chances brightened. If they were to run across some of the enemy in the ravine it would undoubtedly have been closer to the rough trenches the Americans had thrown up.

Once they were compelled to crouch lower and almost hold their breath as they heard voices close by, speaking in German. Peering out from the leafy shelter, they could see a squad of helmeted men clustered about an officer who seemed to be instructing them.

Finally Mart realized that they had gone beyond the scene of the battery's operations, the sound of the frequent discharges guiding him in this decision.

Finding that the friendly ravine took a favourable bend at that point he concluded to hold fast, and see if they might not be able to take advantage of its shelter the entire distance.

This actually proved possible, and it was with con-

siderable satisfaction that in the end Mart discovered the working battery in full view, and close at hand. There were three light guns which were being served by a squad of industrious Germans. An officer stood near at hand, and gave orders.

To the surprise of Mart he just then discovered that there was an airplane circling overhead. This accounted for the increasing accuracy of the German fire, for they had been acting on the signals transmitted by the observer accompanying the air pilot above, who could look down, despite the low lying mist, on the position occupied by the Yankee battalion at bay in an opening of the woods.

They had already been an hour on the way, and there could be no telling what serious damage shells and shrapnel had been doing among their companions all that time. Not another minute was to be lost in needless preparation.

Mart lined his three marksmen up, and then simply said:

“ You know what you are here for ; go to it ! ”

So the guns commenced to speak, and consternation fell upon the men manning that battery. The officer fell first of all, and Mart felt a queer sensation grip his heart as he realized that this was war. But a soldier has no business to allow such a feeling to gain the mastery over him. He had been ordered to silence that battery, and he meant to do it, no matter at what cost.

By now, the amazed enemy was in full flight, evidently labouring under the belief that the whole Yankee battalion had come up. Mart, discovering that the coast was clear, now took his handful of men and, dashing forward, demolished the battery.

His method of doing this had been decided on beforehand. One of the field pieces being ready for firing, he had his men wheel it around so that it covered the other two guns.

“Now, fire, and smash the whole carriage of the first gun!” he ordered, and was obeyed with a hurrah.

So well satisfied was he with the result that he had the operation repeated. This left but the one gun in any serviceable condition. How to put this out of commission puzzled Mart, but only for a minute. Discovering an ax near by he snatched it up, and proceeded to batter the breech of the German-made field piece until he had damaged it so badly that it could never be worked again until it had been sent to some machine shop.

It was high time they were off, since the demoralized Germans were apt to recover from their panic and come back to see what was going on. The ditch that had served their purpose so splendidly on their outward trip could hardly be improved on; and so Mart led the way toward the position their comrades were holding so grimly.

On the way they had just one little meeting with

a party of the enemy, during which there was an exchange of shots. But apparently this satisfied the Huns, for they made off hurriedly as if going for reinforcements; but of course Mart had no idea of waiting for them to return.

Less than two hours after leaving on his desperate effort he was saluting the major and saying:

“ Battery’s done for, sir; three guns, and all destroyed, with no casualties among my force!”

The major was so delighted that he warmly congratulated Mart, who blushed under the praise. And at least after that they were not worried by exploding shells or shrapnel.

As the afternoon wore on it was decided to make another advance. The major did not like the idea of spending the night in that neighbourhood, and believed they stood a fair chance of bettering their condition, which his officers admitted could hardly be worse. That started them off again, and in the mist they groped their way forward.

As the day drew near its close it was discovered by Lieutenant Maillard that a section of his company had become separated from the main body. They hardly knew where they were, save that it must be between the lines, with enemies all around them. The situation was perilous, and the members of the little company were dismayed by their discovery.

Mart was glad to hear that instead of wandering

around further in an attempt to find the rest of the battalion, Tom was giving orders to make camp. They would lie quiet there, if the enemy allowed it; and in the morning make another attempt to get in touch with some of their fellow soldiers.

A dismal prospect faced the lost company now. They were without a bite of food for supper, and were forced to keep on guard against surprise throughout the entire night that had settled down, black and forbidding.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FUGITIVES

WHEN Thomas Bartlett admitted to his companion, Paul Caslon, that he thought what they could so plainly hear in their rear must be the sound of horses' hoofs beating on the hard road, and that in all probability they were being pursued, he only voiced the convictions of the other.

"If that's the case, what ought we to do?" demanded Paul, as he raised the fragment of a whip and brought it down sharply on the bony back of their old horse.

The beast gave a little forward plunge, but was really incapable of keeping up any improvement. Paul continued to urge him along, but quickly realized that it was a hopeless case.

"No use trying that game, Thomas," he grumbled.

"I'd about made up my mind to the same thing myself," replied the other. "So there's only one thing left to us."

"What is that?" asked Paul, turning his head to listen to the pounding of hoofs, now coming more clearly than before on the night air.

"We must turn in somewhere close by, and aban-

don our rig," continued the recognized leader of the expedition.

At the same time he turned the labouring horse in to the side of the road, and drew up. Paul was down almost as soon as the lumbering vehicle came to a stop. He could hear a movement amidst the hay, then Frank Bartlett thrust his head out, and asked in a husky tone:

"What's going on, Paul?"

"We are pursued, Thomas thinks," came the reply. "If you listen you can easily hear the thud of horses' hoofs; and they're bearing down on us in a hurry, too. Everybody must get out. Mother, Henry, this way! Leave your quarters."

There was a further movement, and the trio soon joined those already on the ground. The situation was so tense that some of them seemed to be holding their breath. Thomas, however, realized that there was still work to be done before the arrival of the pursuing horsemen.

"Come, we must lead the beast into the shelter of the woods here," he told the others. "There's enough light for them to notice the wagon on the side of the road; and that would surely give us away."

The tired animal had to be urged to start again, so Paul made further use of the whip. Between them they managed to get "Dobbin," as Paul always called the ancient steed, to cover twenty yards

or more of ground. This carried them far enough into the copse for the wagon to be completely hidden, even though the night had been far less dark at the time.

"They are close by now," whispered Paul to the leader.

All of them stood listening. Thomas had taken the precaution to throw a cloth taken from the wagon over the head of the horse. This was to prevent the animal from giving a whinny when he scented the presence of some of his kind close by. Thomas remembered having read of this trick being practised on the Western plains by cowboys and the Indians under similar conditions, and usually with success.

The thud of hoofs now became quite clear, and they knew that there must be at least four or five persons making up the approaching squad. To the dismay of the fugitives the pursuers drew rein exactly where the wagon had left the road.

At first Paul was very much afraid lest they might have noticed tracks that excited their suspicions; but on second thought he changed his mind, and decided that it was only a matter of chance they came to a halt, just in front of them of all places.

With wildly beating hearts the little party cowered in their hiding place and strained their hearing in order to catch what was being said. Of course the men spoke in German, but all of them were

familiar enough with the language to be able to understand most of what was said, even though only Thomas and Paul could master it so as to talk with a native and not betray themselves.

"We should be close on their heels by now," one man was saying.

"That old horse could never get much further than here without dropping in his tracks, depend on it," another added with a hoarse laugh.

"Another spurt and we shall overtake the silly fools who think they can give us the slip. It will go hard with them after all this trouble which they are making us. The colonel was angry when he heard they had slipped away."

"And if he can ever lay hands on the owner of that horse it will be a sad day for the hog, I can tell you!"

While this talk went on those cowering in the bushes close by the roadside were fearful lest something occur to make the mounted soldiers suspect the truth. In such an event it would be of little use to try to run, for they must be quickly overtaken.

"But we must be getting on again," one of the Germans now called out to his mates; he had dismounted and seemed to be looking at the fetlocks of his horse, as though a perceptible limp had caused him to fear the animal had gone lame.

Frank felt like saying most fervently, "that's just

what all of us are thinking, my friend, and the sooner you skip out the better we will like it; so trot along now and be good!"

All this while Dobbin had behaved himself very well. True, he did not seem to fancy having his head enclosed in what felt like a gunny-sack, and several times moved as though trying to shove his nose out of its confinement.

This alarmed Thomas, so that he gripped the animal's muzzle more tenaciously than ever, determined that there should be no betrayal if he could help it.

"Listen all," said the one who appeared to be the leader of the squad. "I do not longer hear the sound of wheels ahead, as we did before. It is possible they have heard our horses pounding this hard roadbed and guessed that they are being followed."

"What then would happen, do you think?" asked one of the others.

"They would try to hide from us," came the reply, accompanied by some expressive words which made Mrs. Caslon shudder. "It would not be so hard to discover just where they abandoned their cart and took to the woods. Then we should start on their trail, and soon overtake the party."

"That is so, Sergeant," a third man hastened to add, "because they could not go fast, for one of them is a woman."

"Forward then!" came the order, accompanied by the plunging of horses feeling the bite of the

spur in their flanks; and away the squad dashed helter-skelter along the road.

"Good-bye to bad rubbish!" said Paul, keeping his voice lowered, for the sound of English in those parts was of such an unusual occurrence that it would be sure to attract attention, if ever so faintly heard.

"But we must not stay here," suggested Thomas. "You heard what they said about following us into the forest if they found we had left the road. It is time we made a fresh start."

"And do we have to abandon our conveyance?" asked Mrs. Caslon, not without a shade of regret in her voice; for while the vehicle had been anything but luxurious in its appointments, and being without springs made riding far from a joyous thing, nevertheless it had taken them miles on their journey, and they would miss old Dobbin sorely. She knew she would, at least.

"Certainly," replied the guide and leader, tersely. "It would be utterly impossible to make any progress whatever through this forest with a wagon. We must come down to walking."

"After all," remarked Frank, "this old crowbait of a nag couldn't have held out for another five miles, I'm sure. Tell us what to do, Thomas, and we'll be only too glad to follow your advice."

"I'm going to lead the horse as far into the wood as possible," the other explained. "Then I mean

to set him free from the shafts, and start him off on his own hook. There may be some stray patches of grass around, which he is bound to search for; and in that way wander far from the place where the wagon is left."

Thomas thereupon proceeded to put the first part of his hastily arranged plan into operation by taking hold of the horse's bridle near the bit, and urging the animal along. Dexterously avoiding all obstacles in the shape of tree-trunks and stumps, he managed to draw the outfit deeper into the forest. Finally he stopped.

"This ought to do the trick," he announced, briskly. "Besides, it's next to impossible to go any further, as the trees grow so close together."

"But they can follow on horseback, I should think," hinted Paul.

"Easily enough," Frank told him. "A single rider can take his horse in and out between the trees in a way a vehicle could never go. But all the same they can only advance as fast as one of their number dismounted is able to pick up and follow our trail."

"Then if we could only hide that in some way they'd be left up a tree, or in the lurch, whichever you choose to call it," observed Paul.

"What's the matter with your doing that part of the job acceptably, Paul?" demanded Henry. "You used to boast of your accomplishments as a

trail-finder when you belonged to the Boy Scouts over home. Now here's as fine a chance to show your cleverness as anybody could want."

"All right, when I'm asked to take hold, maybe I will," hinted Paul, as much as to say that he was not the one to try to usurp authority.

Meanwhile Thomas had hastily taken off the harness so that the old horse was able to step out free as soon as the shafts dropped down. Next Thomas gave the animal a hearty slap on the haunch that started him off at a dismal pace, far from exhilarating.

"Now for the next step in our program!" Thomas cried. "So far we have done very well; and if our luck only holds good I'm in hope we'll be able to snap our fingers at those Uhlan guards. Come, let's start, friends. Henry, you and Frank look after your mother; Paul, stick by me!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE STORY THE BIG GUNS TOLD

“**A**RE we heading the right way, Thomas, do you think?” asked Mrs. Caslon, after they had been trudging along uncomplainingly for some time.

There had been a period in her life when she could never have endured such rigours and hardships. That was before she found herself held a prisoner, so far as liberty to leave Austria went. Since that time, now three years and more back in the past, Paul and Henry’s mother had endured many things. Her most ardent desire was to see the land she loved once more, to get away from all the horrors of war, and to live in peace.

“There’s only one guide we can have,” Thomas told her, confidently. “For some time now we’ve been hearing the heavy sound of firing ahead of us, and it’s easy to believe that must mean the fighting front lies yonder.”

“They keep the racket going pretty steadily, don’t they?” observed Henry. “Does it mean there’s a battle raging to the southwest of us, Thomas?”

“That’s the only explanation I can think of,” came the reply. “We’ve been listening all summer to the boasting of our German guards about what

Ludendorff has been doing to the French and British, how he's kept knocking 'em back right along, that he means to be in Paris this fall without fail. But somehow I haven't believed a quarter of what I heard."

"Same here," Paul spoke up. "When they got to taunting me about the poor shakes of soldiers our drygoods clerks and college students would make, I just threw it back in their teeth by telling them they had made the same blunder about the British."

"Just what they did," added Frank, quickly. "Called the first lot that came across the Channel a 'contemptible little army'; but all the same those fellows fought the proud Germans like everything, and left half their number at Mons and other places."

"Better not talk any more just now," remonstrated Thomas. "There's no telling what sort of fruit some of these trees may be bearing. For all we know each one may have a machine-gunner hiding among the branches; and it's a mighty risky thing to be speaking English around here."

The other boys recognized the truth of this warning, and for a time all fell silent. Each one of the party save Mrs. Caslon carried some sort of bundle over his shoulder. True, these were not of any great value, outside of the food they contained; but just then they represented the amount of their worldly possessions.

From time to time they continued to hear the

deepening roar of big guns talking, always ahead of them. As these suggestive sounds reached the ears of the weary fugitives their thoughts took an upward trend, and in imagination they could glimpse the picture of the rival armies facing each other, ready for a resumption of the battle with the coming dawn.

Yes, and another inspiring thought appealed to them as they heard the deep-throated reverberations coming over the hills and through the forest. This was that Americans might be in that opposing line, elbow to elbow with the dauntless French troops who battled for the home-land.

They had never been told that Pershing had come over the sea with the first detachment of boys in khaki; yet in some mysterious fashion they had divined this fact, from certain things that did reach them.

Now of course they knew what vast undertakings their country had plunged into. The American aviator, dropping his paper with its startling news, had caused a song of rejoicing to burst forth in their hitherto saddened hearts. It was as if they realized, after all these months of repining amazing events were on the eve of happening, that the Teuton hosts had met with a tremendous setback, and right then were being beaten at every point of the extended front lying between the sea and Switzerland's border.

"I wonder," Paul finally said, in a low voice, as though his thoughts must find expression somehow, "if any one of those guns is manned by *our* boys?"

Even Thomas could not keep from showing a keen interest in that question, despite his injunction for silence.

"Stranger things have happened," he admitted.

"Why," added Paul, quickly, "it just seems to me as if some of those booming sounds were speaking to me, and saying, 'here we are, Paul, the boys from the U. S. A., a million and more of us, with other millions on the way. And with Uncle Sam throwing his hat into the ring the end is in sight. We're on our way, and never will be stopped till we march down Unter den Linden in Berlin!' And I believe it in my heart."

"Speed the day!" said Thomas, fervently.

"I am praying for it every night," Mrs. Caslon added.

"Do you know," ventured Henry, "I've been wondering whether any of our friends could have come across in the new army they've raised since a year ago. Wouldn't it be great if we'd learn that Tom Maillard, or perhaps the two Dorr boys, had enlisted, and were even now within fifty miles of this spot?"

"Possible, but hardly probable," Thomas told the dreamer. "They're most too young, I take it, to join the colours."

Thomas being several years the senior was in the habit of looking upon all the others of the party visiting Europe when the Great War broke out as "youngsters." Henry, however, was not easily convinced.

"Well, I know what sort of a fellow Tom is," he continued; "and unless I'm a whole lot mistaken he'd be fairly wild to come across. That is, if he and Lucille ever got out of Northern France in safety."

"Oh," Paul informed him, "they had a much better chance of doing that than the Dorrs, caught up in Belgium, like as not, when the Germans rushed the border."

As Thomas showed signs of impatience the conversation dropped after it had reached this point, and they continued to push on in almost absolute silence.

Mrs. Caslon had commenced to betray evidences of weariness. Paul and his brother found this out by the way she began to lean more and more heavily upon them.

In fact they were all becoming tired, for since leaving the horse and wagon they had covered a long distance. Besides, the loads on their backs, while seeming light in the start, had latterly begun to grow heavy.

It was hard for them to think of stopping when they knew so well that every step taken brought

them just that much nearer liberty. They had looked forward so long to this occasion that they were in a mood to try their endurance to the utmost.

Thomas, however, knew that before long they must come to a halt, and take some rest. The night had worn along so that dawn could not be very far distant now; and that was another factor in causing him to reach a decision in the matter.

One thing they did which must not be neglected. This was to hide their trail as best the conditions allowed.

To Paul this had been delegated, because, as Henry had remarked, his previous experience when wearing the khaki of a Boy Scout had made him something of an authority in this.

Accordingly Paul took the lead for a time. He kept a vigilant lookout for the conditions which he knew would most favour his plan. Thus when they came to a long tree-trunk that chanced to lie across their path he would ask his companions to walk along it, and step off on to a stone ledge that cropped out conveniently near by.

In such ways he was making it difficult for any one to follow their trail. Even if a pursuer were experienced in such matters it must take infinite patience as well as the loss of considerable time to accomplish it; while with such novices as those German soldiers the chances were they must speedily give it up as an impossible job.

Somehow all this appeared to encourage the fugitives. Their greatest fear had been that the mounted men might chase after them, and in the end force them to go back to that captivity they detested.

Just as Thomas expected, Mrs. Caslon finally gave out.

"I dislike to tell you that I am afraid I cannot go any further, boys," she said, with a sigh, as she came to a full stop.

"It was cruel of us to force you to keep it up this long, Mother," said Paul, rather conscience stricken.

"We can stop here just as well as not," asserted Thomas, quickly.

"Morning will soon be along," added Frank; "right now you can see it growing a little pink in the sky yonder, which, I take it, is the east."

"Yes, that must be the flush that comes before dawn," Henry put in. "Oh, don't I hope that before another morning breaks we'll have crossed the line, and found refuge with the French,—or our own boys in khaki!"

They chanced to be in an opening, where the wood had been cleared at sometime or other, perhaps by charcoal burners. It was even possible to look up and see the sky above them, which in itself was a treat, after being so long in the dense forest.

They first found a spot where they would be concealed by some of the friendly growth. Here they

spread their poor excuses for blankets given them by their captors in exchange for the woollen ones they had owned during the early time of their captivity.

Mrs. Caslon had hardly been bundled up before she fell asleep, proving how desperately she was in need of rest. Henry, too, soon followed her example, being "all in," as he vaguely announced to his brother Paul.

Even Thomas did not hesitate to admit that he would be the better for a little refreshing sleep, as he made a nest for himself amidst the bushes. They kept close together, as those who know their peril are ever apt to do. At any minute something might happen to bring them face to face with further danger; and, somehow, there seemed to be safety in numbers.

The dawn broke, the sun peeped above the eastern horizon, and started on his daily upward climb; yet the fugitives slept as calmly as if safe in their beds at home in peaceful America, with no hovering peril to interfere with their slumbers.

It must have been well on toward nine o'clock when Paul lifted his head suddenly, aroused by some sound that struck him as suspicious. Then he scrambled to his feet, and started to look around him.

Finally, attracted by a continuation of the mysterious noises, he turned his eyes heavenward, and

had no sooner done so than he felt a thrill pass through him. Stepping over he shook Thomas and then Frank, saying in excited tones:

“Wake up, fellows! We’ve slept long enough! The sun is hours high, and something is happening close by that we ought to be watching!”

CHAPTER XXVI

FOR FRANCE

IT seemed a repetition of the astonishing picture they had watched in the sky at the time that bold American pilot fought his German rival, for two circling airplanes were engaged in a desperate duel.

By now the others had become aware that something unusual was occurring, and first Henry, and then Mrs. Caslon, joined the three already standing on the rim of the clearing, staring upwards, fascinated.

Thomas of course hastened to secure his broken glasses, and glued them to his eyes. Such a picture was a novelty to them, and so far as the four boys were concerned it held them spellbound. Mrs. Caslon looked simply because she found it impossible to refrain, but her face expressed more anxiety than satisfaction.

"What do you make them out to be, Thomas?" asked Paul. "They're at such a fierce height that a fellow can't be sure with the naked eye, though of course one must be a Hun."

"The other is a French machine, I imagine," reported Thomas. "Whoever the pilot may be he's certainly a hummer. Just see how he manipulates

his plane! A hawk swooping down on its prey couldn't beat that manœuvring much."

"I warrant you the pilot is an ace, and has brought down his five foes, all right," asserted Paul, stoutly. "Oh! did you ever see anything to equal that drop? And he's recovered like magic!"

"That was the German aviator," explained the one with the glasses; "but the Frenchman is right on his tail, you notice."

"Now that they're getting lower I can see the manœuvring better," crowed Paul, just as though the affair aloft were being staged for his particular benefit.

The battle continued with many fluctuations, and those below could distinctly catch the chatter of the working machine-guns as the rivals tried by every device known to aviators to get in a telling shot.

With both planes circling, dodging, climbing, and dropping in rapid succession it was a difficult thing to gain the advantage. The watchers remarked that each of the clever rivals unloosed many a dodge, only to have it skilfully warded off by his competitor. In the end the one whose bag of tricks turned out to be the longest, or whose lucky star was in the ascendant, would likely come off victor.

Naturally all of the spectators below were fervently hoping the French pilot would prove more than a match for his antagonist. When there was a choice they must always favour the enemy of

the Teuton, for had they not suffered untold humiliations and privations at the hands of the Central Powers?

The battle continued for nearly ten minutes. Then came a decision. The machine they believed to be German-made was descending swiftly, with flames bursting from its petrol tank.

Paul gave a low cry. It stood for exultation as well as the opening of the safety-valve of his feelings.

"The Hun is falling!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Caslon covered her eyes; she could not bear to watch the descent of the doomed aviator. The four boys, however, followed his fall with grim visage; they felt that somehow or other the brave Frenchman was avenging some of the multitude of wrongs done by the invaders of his beloved France.

"He's down!" announced Thomas, solemnly, though they had not heard any crash to announce the fact, as the wreck of the plane had reached ground some little distance away.

"But look there!" snapped Thomas. "The Frenchman is in trouble, too!"

"I believe you're right!" echoed Paul.

They again looked upward, and could see that the second plane was also coming down. Henry was of the opinion that the pilot meant to make sure his late antagonist had been completely disabled, and he demanded:

"Does he have to do that and take all the risk just to say he's entitled to another count?"

"No, he's volplaning because his engine has been struck, and is out of commission," explained Thomas.

"Just what's happening," added Paul. "And right now he's got to make some sort of landing near here!"

"I hope then he's noticed this big opening," Frank chimed in.

"It's his only chance; and unless he's mighty clever he must drop in a way likely to break bones!" said Thomas.

They fairly held their breath, and watched the furious struggle of the Frenchman to regain control of his mutinous plane. He was doing gallantly, but nevertheless his descent was so rapid that Mrs. Caslon gave a low cry of commiseration, under the impression that the aviator must surely be killed.

Presently the machine struck the earth with a loud crash. Already all the party of fugitives were running in that direction, for the French plane had fallen in the opening, just as Frank had thought might be the case.

It was with considerable relief that they saw the aviator moving amidst the wreckage of his machine. The heavy engine had not crushed him, as so often happens in an accident of this kind, they judged.

Reaching the spot, Thomas led his chums in the

work of rescue. They managed to get the pilot out, though his left arm dangled helplessly at his side, showing that it had been broken.

He was undoubtedly a Frenchman, for in spite of the queer costume which, as an aviator, he was wearing, they could catch glimpses of a French officer's uniform underneath the warm outer garments.

"Are you much hurt, Monsieur?" asked Thomas, wishing as never before that he could speak and understand French as well as he did German.

The other evidently was just as unable to express himself in English; judging from his shrug and the way he said something in French; but he pointed to the remains of his machine, and then touched his injured arm tenderly.

"I think he is asking us if we can do anything with that arm of his," observed Paul, hastily. "It's been fractured, as sure as you live; I can tell it from the way it hangs down."

"And say, it must hurt like everything!" ventured Henry, with sympathy in his voice.

"No, just now I think it's only numb," continued Paul. "By tomorrow, though, it's bound to be mighty painful. This is the best time to get the ends of the bones together, you know, when the fracture is fresh."

"Then why can't you do something for him, Paul?" demanded Frank. "Haven't I heard you

boasting many a time of your ability in first aid work, learned ever so long ago? Haven't you even done things equal to setting a broken leg?"

Paul was only waiting for some encouragement like this to offer his services to the wounded French aviator. The other understood what his gestures meant, even though the words accompanying them seemed to be a sealed book to him. Smiling as though his spirit had not been in the least cast down by his mishap, he allowed Paul to take off some of his outer garments; and presently the young American was engaged in setting the arm, enlisting Frank and Thomas in the work as his helpers.

Mrs. Caslon and Henry turned aside, and appeared to be examining the remains of the battle plane; but in reality they could not bear to watch the actions of the others, feeling sure that the crude surgical work must bring excruciating pain in its train.

When finally the broken arm was set Paul declared himself well satisfied with the result.

"I'm proud of that job, fellows," he told his companions. "And I hope a regular army surgeon takes a look at the same. I always knew my forte lay along that line. And say, if I manage to get across to the American front it's me to join the army as a hospital surgeon's helper."

Thomas now tried to make the Frenchman understand that they were in camp near by, and that he would be welcome to join them in some sort of light

breakfast. Most of this was carried on by means of gestures, but two intelligent people can manage to understand what is meant in this fashion, even when grossly unacquainted with each other's language.

So the pilot without a machine turned to the wreckage and secured a few of his prized personal belongings which he did not wish to lose. These consisted for the most part of several instruments that could be easily carried, his binoculars in their well-used case, and an extra coat that had possibly been with him on many an adventurous expedition, and was valued on account of its associations.

"Do you think it wise to stay around here, Thomas?" Henry now asked.

"What makes you say that?" questioned the other.

"Only that it struck me," explained Henry, "that some of the Germans may have seen the fall of the airplanes and would come this way to look them up, thinking to make a prisoner of the French pilot, if he survived the fall."

Thomas looked troubled.

"Now that's a clever point for you to make, Henry," he said, warmly; "and I guess it would be taking only proper precautions if we cut out of this. We can cover a mile or two, and then halt for breakfast. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Caslon?"

"I most certainly do, Thomas. And as I feel quite refreshed after that three hour sleep you needn't worry about my failing you, for a while at least."

They trudged along, and fortunately saw nothing to cause any alarm. If there were enemies abroad in the forest, they did not show themselves; though the sound of firing grew more and more insistent, as though there might be swarms of rival soldiers engaged in battling for supremacy within a radius of ten miles or so.

Finally the fugitives found just the place for the halt they had in view. The friendly bushes would go far toward hiding them from any passing hostile force; and it was an out-of-the-way spot in the bargain.

So they opened their bundles, and spread some of their meagre fare on the ground. Having another mouth to fill would make considerable difference in the holding out of their food reserves, scanty at the best; but none of them begrudged the valiant Frenchman his share. In their eyes he was the embodiment of the freedom they hoped to be soon enjoying.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HUT IN THE WOOD

AFTER relieving their hunger they once more commenced a forward movement. Something seemed to be beckoning them on, something that no one could wholly define, save that it spelled freedom and a chance to return to the dear homeland across the wide sea.

If only they might find themselves safe at last within the lines of the Allies, their troubles would all be over, they felt certain. And so they kept up their spirits as they trudged wearily along.

Thomas listened to each fresh burst of firing with a frown on his honest face. Paul was watching, and noticed this. He edged closer to the other, and finally, desirous of carrying on his little conversation without the others hearing what was said, remarked in a low tone:

"You're bothered a heap, I can see, Thomas. Have we lost the way? or is it that the firing, getting so loud, makes you think we'll run across some of the Huns presently?"

"A little of both things, Paul," frankly admitted the other. "I'm not quite sure of my bearings.

And if all those shots mean anything, we're drawing close to where the fighting is hot."

"How would it do then," continued Paul, temptingly, "for us to look up some sort of hide-out, where we could lie low until we knew what was happening?"

"I'd consider such a thing, if only any one would show me a decent hole that would shelter us," responded the leader, promptly.

"Then you give me permission to keep on the lookout for a place, do you, Thomas?" begged Paul, who, truth to tell, was thinking more of his mother's condition than any discomfort or danger connected with himself.

"Please yourself, Paul," came the reply.

A short time later Paul made a discovery; and, plucking at the arm of Thomas, he drew the other's attention to some object ahead.

"Isn't that a part of an old stone wall, such as we've seen around the sector where we were kept prisoners?" he asked.

"You are quite right there, Paul," he was told. "It is a wall, made by the peasants piling up loose stones year after year. That's the only kind of a division fence they know around this country, where lumber is so scarce that it can't be wasted. It shows that some chap used to live here, and I reckon he may have been a charcoal-burner; or perhaps engaged in raising rabbits for the Paris market."

"But I saw something move about that stone-pile just then, Thomas!" continued the other excitedly. "There! Didn't you catch that flash, as if the sun had glinted off some metal? Why, there are several men bobbing up! And I declare they look like German soldiers too, because they have the spiked helmet on their heads! What can they be doing there?"

"I think I know," affirmed the other, as they came to a sudden halt. "What you saw was the sun striking a machine-gun they're fixing back of that stone fence!"

"You mean they expect to make a stand right there, and pour in a hot fire when their enemies come up?" Paul continued, his excitement increasing. "That would explain it! Whoever their enemies turn out to be they are on their way here, Thomas! Don't you see? What we have to do is to wait, and it's going to be all right."

"Well, first of all we ought to back out of this before they see us," suggested the leader. "The only reason that hasn't happened as yet is because they're keeping up a close watch in the other direction."

The fugitives lost no time in retreating. When Thomas thought they had gone far enough he again changed the course of their advance. His intention was to pass around the stone-heap at a safe distance, all the while continuing to keep an earnest

lookout for some friendly nook where they could hide successfully.

It was about half an hour afterwards that Paul again uttered an exclamation that thrilled them all.

"If that isn't a deserted cabin over yonder then I'm a whole lot mistaken! Thomas, don't you see it almost hidden among the trees where that queer looking trunk bends like a rainbow?"

"It's a hut, all right, Paul, no mistake about that," said the other, after taking a good look.

"And you can't see a sign of life about it, either," Paul went on. "That ought to make it a boss place for us to lie low in until the French or our boys clean up this neck of the forest. How about that, Thomas?"

Before replying the other took a careful survey. He failed to discover anything that looked like hovering peril, and when he spoke again it was to agree to Paul's proposition.

"We'll have a look-in, at any rate, and then decide," he told them, at the same time leading the way toward the lonely looking and apparently deserted woodman's cabin.

They were close to it when Henry broke out with a remark, his voice giving plain evidences of a disturbed state of mind.

"Look at those two fresh mounds of earth over there, boys! I believe they must be graves, and made not long ago, either!"

"Just what they are!" Thomas assented, uneasily eyeing the spot, while Paul gritted his teeth, and said almost fiercely:

"Some Hun depravity, just as like as not. They've been here, and to impress their frightfulness on the peasants that live in this forest they've made an example of the poor man and his wife. Perhaps they claimed that some one had fired a shot, and so there must be payment made, no matter how innocent the victims might be."

They all gazed toward the twin mounds with a weight pressing down on their hearts. Of course they had heard next to nothing concerning the dreadful things which had come to Belgians, Serbians, and French who dared resist the progress of the invading Teuton hosts; but they had read enough between the lines of the German boasting to give them a good insight into the settled policy of the Kaiser's soldiers.

Was the hut empty?

This thought struck all of them at about the same moment, and, coming to a halt, they listened intently.

"I heard something move inside the place," announced Paul, turning toward Thomas as he whispered this.

The latter crept softly up, and with great care projected his head just a little way around the corner. He was thus able to see through the open

doorway; and after taking one good look he beckoned with his hand for the others to approach, which they did, wondering greatly.

The only inmates of the abandoned hut were two small ragged children about six and eight years of age. The older, a lad with flashing black eyes, seemed a manly lad, for he had cooked a hare, evidently caught in a snare, and was dividing it with the other child, a pretty little girl with black curls, and the French look on her face.

“The poor dears!” exclaimed Mrs. Caslon, her mother heart bleeding for pity as the thought came to her that possibly these children had been left fatherless and motherless through some inhuman act on the part of brutes; and perhaps for weeks now the little fellow had been taking good care of his sister.

It was wonderful how he had ever done it, and the boys were never able to understand it; yet it turned out to be just so. The children showed signs of great alarm when they heard voices; but it interested the party of fugitives to notice how the lad placed his little figure squarely in front of his sister, as if to defy any one to injure her while he was by.

But instead of fierce-looking and loud-talking German soldiers the two orphans saw with surprise and delight that those who had come upon them were friends. Mrs. Caslon could not restrain her-

self, and rushing forward with exclamations of pity she clasped the tiny French girl in her arms and pressed the struggling child to her heart.

But her kisses speedily convinced the little one that only love lay back of that violent demonstration, and so she became reconciled, after a good look in the widow's kindly face.

The children could, of course, neither speak nor understand English, but the French captain, whom the American boys had rescued from the wrecked airplane, exchanged sentences with the boy, who was delighted to hear his own tongue spoken. Afterwards the pilot made suggestive motions as he talked volubly, pointing first at the lad, whose head he was patting, and then out of the door to where those fresh mounds told the sad story.

"It's all as plain as print," said Thomas, afterwards. "The Germans came here and found some excuse to kill the poor peasant and his wife, after which they tried to set fire to the hut. But when they went off that splendid boy must have managed in some way to get the fire out before it could do much damage."

"Yes," added Paul, eagerly, "and can it be possible these kids actually dug graves for their parents, and placed them there? Oh, never did I hear of such a sad thing! Why, he's a regular little hero, that's what!"

"No wonder," added Frank, "the French sol-

diers fight so bravely, when even the little tots are so fearless. Look at those black eyes of his, will you, Henry? Don't you see the look of true grit in them?"

"We'll have to adopt these children, that's what!" declared Paul. "We'll see that they get some place where they can be taken care of."

"If we keep on," chuckled Frank, "we'll be taking out quite a squad with us. We started with five, and already the number is eight. But this hut is as good a place as any for our hide-out. I don't believe the Huns will bother to come here again."

"Thomas must decide all that," suggested Mrs. Caslon.

Thomas must have already settled the question in his own mind, for he announced that they would stay where they were, for the present at least. If another night found them still free to continue their flight, it would be time to think of going on.

So they settled down to await what the uncertain future might have in store for them, not knowing but that at any minute they might hear loud voices, and find themselves confronted by German soldiers, who would drag them back to the captivity they dreaded.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SURROUNDED BY THE ENEMY

ONE of the first things Lieutenant Maillard did upon deciding to stay where they were for the night, and try to locate the rest of the battalion when morning arrived, was to "count noses."

"Sergeant Dorr," he told Mart, as that individual saluted upon obeying a beckoning hand, "how many men have we along with us right now?"

"Haven't thought to figure it out, sir, but will do so, and report if you so order," came the reply; for Mart knew that all familiarity must be dropped when in contact with his superior officer, especially when the eyes of other men in khaki were upon them.

"Do so, and let me know as soon as possible," said Tom.

A few minutes later the sergeant was saluting again.

"I have rounded them all up, sir, and find that counting every man in the ranks, including a corporal and a sergeant, you have just twenty-seven in the detachment."

"That is all, Sergeant," the other replied. "I

had hoped there might be more than that, for unless the signs deceive me we shall have need of many rifles before we are done with this job. I will let you know if there is anything else you can do for me, Sergeant."

Perhaps, had any sharp-eyed person been close enough to see their eyes distinctly, he might have detected something very like a suggestive wink exchanged between the lieutenant and his non-commissioned assistant, but not a single word passed that was not strictly in accord with military discipline.

So the little company proceeded to make camp after a rough fashion. The men had been on the jump pretty much the whole of the preceding day, and that, with the "sniping" whenever they ran upon an enemy machine-gun emplacement, they found themselves thoroughly tired.

"I guess I'll sleep without any rocking tonight," Dick Rouse told Harvey Dorr, as they busied themselves picking out a fairly decent spot for spreading their army blankets.

"Ditto here," responded the other; and then with a suspicious glance upward he went on to say: "I hope though it doesn't rain. Being without any kind of shelter, such as tents, or a roof over our heads, would make it kind of rough going for us."

"Oh, well, at the worst we can use our ponchos for dog-tents, and keep half-way dry — from the waist up," Dick told him. Rouse was a cheerful

fellow, and able to "throw dull care over his shoulder," as the other boys were in the habit of saying.

"The worst of it all is we haven't any chow along," grumbled Harvey. "I can stand heaps of things and never whimper, but being sent to bed hungry used to be my worst punishment as a kid."

"What can't be cured must be endured," Dick continued, in his bracing way. "Now, I've got a rule I always bring out on such occasions. You know I once worked with a surveyor for a while, and as we took jobs that other fellows scorned, we often found ourselves so far away from any habitation that we missed connection with our meals."

"So you had a plan to forget your troubles, did you?" demanded Harvey, suddenly interested. "Tell me what it was like, and it may help me forget that my inner man is calling pretty loud right now for supplies."

"Oh, I just make up my mind that I'm sitting down to a Thanksgiving dinner, and ask myself to have a second helping of turkey, stuffing, and all the fixings — celery, mashed potatoes, cranberries and onions, winding up with two big wedges of pumpkin pie. Then I warn myself not to be a hog, but get up from the table while still able to breathe freely."

"And does that make you feel satisfied?" groaned Harvey. "Well, I must say you're a queer dicky then; because my mouth would fairly water

when I tried to imagine such a feast. I guess my way is the better one for me."

"And what do you try so as to forget it?" asked Dick.

"Just draw in my belt two notches, and then by the feel I seem to imagine I'm full to capacity. Somehow the empty sensation goes, too. Better try the wrinkle some time, Dick. But here comes my cousin Mart looking around as if he'd lost something. What's in the wind, Seregant?"

"I'm looking for Private Collins. The lieutenant wants to see him," Mart condescended to explain.

"You'll find him just over by the tree that has the overhanging limb," Harvey told him. "Collins has had considerable experience in the woods, and knows how to pick out the best location for sleeping."

"Just what I explained to Tom — I mean Lieutenant Maillard," the sergeant threw over his shoulder as he hastened forward.

A few minutes later Private Collins found himself facing his superior officer, now in command of the lost detachment, whom he saluted with military precision.

"I want you to do a service for the company, Collins," Tom told him. "We are in a bad hole, I'm afraid, with the enemy all around us. From indications they outnumber us many times; in fact, unless we get in touch with the rest of the battalion we may be cut down to the last man. You under-

stand from what I am telling you how desperate our situation is? ”

“ Yes, sir,” came the answer.

“ Very well,” continued the other. “ You are to leave the camp here, and try the best you know how to make your way back to where you may hope to come upon the rest of our battalion. One man can do what would be impossible for twenty-seven. Got that, Collins? ”

“ Yes, sir, I understand,” came the reply.

“ Do you think you can manage to make your way through the line of the enemy, depending only on yourself for everything? ” pursued Tom.

“ I have had considerable experience in such matters, sir,” Collins answered after a little hesitation, as if he realized that it would be really taking his life in his hands.

“ Then consider this an order,” Tom told him. “ Leave the camp immediately, and if you have the good luck to find the major explain how we are situated here. I have no doubt but that he will ask you to guide a section of the battalion back. Indeed, if the colonel is present he may even see fit to start the entire regiment in this direction, without waiting for daylight to come. That is all, Collins. Remember, I am depending on you.”

“ I’ll do my best, sir,” said the private, and again throwing up his right hand in salute, he wheeled and walked away.

Shortly afterward Tom saw him leave. He noticed that Collins did not display any great alacrity about his movements, even looking back several times, as though he disliked very much to assume this perilous duty.

"I'm afraid he isn't quite the fellow I took him to be," Tom told himself. "He shows signs of being beaten before he gets into the affair. When a man starts looking over his shoulder in a fight you can depend on it he's already thinking of running. I'd better be deciding on another messenger to send out, if Collins fails me."

One thing pleased Harvey very much. He had been put in charge of the only machine-gun in the detachment. Mart had managed to let the lieutenant know how proficient his cousin had become in the use of such a weapon, so Tom was "playing no favourites" when he detailed Harvey for that particular job.

It was also discovered that their luck held good in another sense, for there seemed to be a fair supply of ammunition with which to feed the hopper of the rapid-fire gun. When in action such a weapon eats up the cartridges so fast, sending out a hail-storm of bullets at the will of the operator, that it is amazing what a vast quantity may be required.

The boys felt half starved, but they were by this time good soldiers, and there was no audible grumbling heard. It seemed to be understood that they

must make the best of a bad situation. Word had also gone around that the lieutenant was sending for help, which would also mean that the "chow wagon" might be along in time for a late breakfast at the worst.

They fixed their pickets, and after that the rude camp under the canopy of the forest trees lay in silence, save when some one sleeping on his back gave forth unpleasant sounds, until an indignant comrade, vainly endeavouring to obtain some rest, would reach over and give him either a ferocious nudge, or else a kick that quickly ended the nocturnal serenade.

Harvey had settled down to take such comfort as might be obtained. Despite his stern resolution not to think of his hungry condition, somehow when he dozed his dreams were all of eating.

"This is certainly the limit for me," he confidentially told Dick, who lay alongside, when such a thing happened for the third time after a short doze. "But while I've just gorged myself at an imaginary Christmas dinner, even to the plum pudding and coffee, somehow I feel as empty as ever."

The other lad in khaki chuckled as if amused.

"You make me think of that story about the darky and the chicken, Harvey," he replied in a low tone, for they had been enjoined about keeping their voices muffled, since sound carried far in the nighttime.

"In what way?" asked Harvey, mildly interested, though he could not help thinking at the moment that the time was hardly proper for telling humorous stories. But Dick was not to be restrained.

"An old darky was sitting at a fire in the woods roasting a chicken before the red embers," Dick went on. "He fell asleep before he got ready to eat his supper. Some boys prowling around discovered him, and stealing the chicken devoured it. Then they placed the heap of bones beside George, and managed to touch his lips with a bit of chicken fat. When the darky suddenly awoke he licked his lips, looked down at the pile of bones, and was heard to say, 'Dat ere fowl done me de leastest good I eber knowed a chicken to do.' And that's the way with your dream, Harvey."

"Well, I hope it doesn't happen again, that's all," said Harvey, drawing his blanket closer around him. "It's just too aggravating for anything."

Of course there were sentries posted around the camp, for every one understood that they must be in the enemy country, having outdistanced the rest of the battalion, after losing their bearings in the late afternoon, owing to the mist and the density of the forest.

Depending on these faithful comrades to guard their slumbers, those whose turn would come later obtained what sleep was possible.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NEVER-SAY-DIE SPIRIT

“LIEUTENANT!”

Tom Maillard sat up. He had been asleep, but nevertheless instantly recognized the voice as belonging to Sergeant Dorr.

“What is it?” he asked, immediately.

“Collins has come back!” reported Mart.

“I’m not so very much surprised,” the other replied. “I had an idea he wouldn’t get through. Send him to me, Sergeant.”

“Yes, sir.”

Presently Collins faced his commanding officer. It was dark under the trees, but Tom could see that the man hung his head as though ashamed of having made a failure of his task.

“How’s this, Collins?” observed the lieutenant, sternly. “I had hoped you were with the battalion by this time; for it must be midnight, or nearly that.”

“I regret to say, sir, I found it impossible to get through,” explained the soldier, apparently quite dejected over his failure.

“What was the trouble?” Tom asked further.

“The enemy seem to be everywhere, sir,” came

the reply. "I tried six different places, and every time ran smack on to a bunch of Heines. Twice I had a narrow escape. After testing it out that far I thought it best to come back and report. If you wish, sir, I'm ready to try again."

Tom knew that he had no heart for the job, so decided it was not policy to use Collins again. A fresh man might be better.

"Never mind, Collins. You undoubtedly did your best; but it wasn't quite good enough. I have another man in mind who may meet with better luck by taking a more roundabout course. That is all, Collins; you may go and lie down until your time comes for picket duty. The sergeant will notify you when that hour arrives."

Collins saluted stiffly and turned away. Doubtless he felt disappointed over having made a failure, for his comrades were bound to lose some of the confidence in his woodcraft which they had formerly entertained. If he had to do it over again it is possible Collins might have made a seventh and even an eighth attempt, in the hope of finding a break in the enemy line; but it was too late now, since the lieutenant had lost faith in him.

Tom sent for the other man he had considered. He was a small, wiry chap, just the type to worm himself through the woods unseen, no matter if the Germans were as "thick as blackberries in August."

Tom also liked the eager way in which he accepted

the mission. There was no boastfulness in his reply ; but a quiet confidence that stood for a whole lot.

"I'll try my level best to fetch assistance, sir," he told the lieutenant, just before turning away.

"He'll do it, too, or die trying, I honestly believe," was the way Tom settled the matter in his mind; a remark which proved how much he had come to rely on his ability to read character.

Later on the lieutenant, being unable to sleep, made the rounds to ascertain how the vigil was being kept. He found the sentries on duty, and wide-awake, which fact pleased him not a little.

All around them lay the sombre forest, in which hundreds, yes even thousands of bitter foes lay waiting to enmesh the advancing Americans.

The mist still persisted. It hung in places like a curtain, so that even had it been daylight the keenest of eyes might not have been able to see any great distance away. Coupled with the shades of night it formed a dense canopy about them, which Tom hoped would at least add to their safety.

He wondered whether Collins had in some way made his presence known to any of the enemy. Tom remembered that he had spoken of having had narrow escapes on several occasions. It might be the Germans had learned of the presence of a lone Yankee in that sector of the forest.

Such a thing was bound to add to the possibility of their camp being discovered. Perhaps some

crafty Hun may even have trailed after Collins when he was making his way back, bent upon learning whether or not he had companions near by.

Tom felt that he would be heartily glad when morning came. It would be easier to see any approaching danger, once the gloom of night had passed; and that counted for something. So he returned to his blanket, and again tried to secure a measure of sleep.

It seemed to Tom that after long efforts to forget his troubles he had just managed to drop into an uneasy slumber when some one came knocking at his elbow. It was, as before, Mart's steady voice that greeted him, although lowered now to a whisper.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but one of the pickets reports movements in the brush beyond his station," was what Mart was saying.

In all probability this meant that their presence was known, and hence they might expect to be attacked at any time.

Tom was now on his feet. He took it coolly enough, Mart was glad to discover, though he ought to have known his old chum would not betray signs of nervousness at such a time.

"Get up all the men, Sergeant," he ordered. "Make sure there is no commotion; and have every one take the position assigned to him before lying down."

"Yes, sir, I understand," said Mart, hurrying away.

There was considerable movement as the men began to seek their pre-arranged positions. Tom had foreseen the possibility of his command being forced to battle for their lives, and every log in the immediate neighbourhood had been brought up, so as to form two lines of breastworks, back of which his men might lie flat on their chests and work their guns to advantage.

They acted like veterans, and Tom felt proud to be in command of such sterling young fighters. Although practically new to the game, they had already proved themselves "fit." And he felt positive that should the Germans find them out and attack, they would meet with a warm reception.

Tom wondered what time it was.

Habit gives one a sense of being able to guess pretty close to the mark, just from the "feel" of the night air; and Tom believed it could not be a great way from daybreak.

He remembered that the Indians always made it a rule to attack just then, possibly acting under the belief that men sleep more soundly late in the night, and the sentries were likely to be dozing on their posts.

For that matter, it might be noticed that in almost every instance where a great attack has been launched by the British or the French, the account

begins with the announcement that "It was just five o'clock on a misty dawn that the troops went over the top, and started the day's drive."

"I'd be a whole lot easier in my mind," Tom told himself, after he had completed the rounds and found everything correct so far as the vigilance of the men was concerned, "if another hour was past, and the grey of dawn showing up in the east. Every minute from now on will seem like an age, and the least rustle in the dead leaves raises a spectre of creeping enemies."

He had given strict orders concerning what should be done in case the discovery was made that an attack was about to come about. No one must fire a shot unless absolutely certain that it was a creeping Hun he saw close by.

Other arrangements had been made whereby certain piles of inflammable torchwood might be set ablaze, so as to show the defenders of the camp how to aim. It paid to make sure that every bullet found its billet, and lessened the number of those with whom they were in conflict.

How the time dragged!

It must have been half an hour after Mart aroused the lieutenant when a single shot rang out, telling that the long expected outbreak had come.

CHAPTER XXX

A CHANGE OF BASE NECESSARY

THAT one crashing report would be enough to tell the oncoming enemy their presence had been discovered, and that further attempts at secrecy were useless. Consequently, having thus embarked on the enterprise these standing at bay must see it through.

“Light the fires!” ordered the commander of the lost detachment.

Those to whom this important duty had been committed were prepared for their task with plenty of matches. They also knew how the spark could best be applied to various little collections of tinder in the shape of dead leaves dashed with oil from cans carried for the lanterns.

Here one fire suddenly blazed up; another quickly followed suit in a different quarter. It was no longer pitch dark under the dense foliage of the forest trees on that night in late September; and when two more fires had been added to the list the men hiding back of the straggly logs could see for quite a distance around them.

But with the dissipation of the gloom a new dan-

ger burst upon them. Guns began to crackle, accompanied by fitful splashes of red that looked for all the world like tongues thrust out wickedly, and as hurriedly withdrawn.

One of the fire-starters was seen to pitch forward and fall heavily. Tom feared he had lost a member of his already too small troop, when, to his delight, he discovered the fellow rolling over and over like a barrel, until in this fashion he managed to gain the protection of the nearest log. It was a clever trick intended to deceive the foe, and so far as the lieutenant knew it proved successful.

The shots grew more insistent. They seemed to come from every direction, north, south, east and west. This would indicate that the enemy had known for some time the exact location of the detachment, and moreover had taken pains to completely surround it.

It looked as though the fight would be one to the death, since there did not seem to be an avenue of escape left open. Tom gritted his teeth. His mind was fully made up to keep going to the very last gasp. As long as he had a round of ammunition left, and some one to man the machine-gun, such a thing as surrender would be the last resource considered.

Some of the Americans now began to return the fire, though under stern orders not to waste a single precious cartridge. There must be no shooting at

random. Unless sure of a mark no man should discharge his gun.

While the fires thus burning aided them to see if the enemy had crept close up, at the same time the light made it more dangerous for those who found such insufficient shelter behind the few logs that were available. From time to time they might expect some of their number to be struck by the bullets now being rained on their position.

Already two of the men showed by their actions that they had been unfortunate enough to be hit by the plunging lead. Mart could see them endeavouring to fasten their bandannas around an arm, or in the other case a leg that had been nipped.

Just then a bullet sang past his own ear, missing him by a fraction of an inch. At the time Mart was prostrate behind a good-sized log, and he wondered just how that missile could have come so close, with such a barricade in front of his body.

Another bullet followed the first. At the same time he caught the familiar hum of a machine-gun close by. This gave him a sudden idea, and at the same moment the man next called out to him:

"Hey, Sarg, the beast is up in a tree over there with his old rattlebox of a bean-shooter. He got up there so he could fire down on us while we lie here so snug! Watch, and you'll see the flashes when he opens up again."

"Pass the word along to Private Dorr to get busy

on that tree!" said Mart. "We've just got to bring that boy down, or he'll play hob with us all."

When Harvey received the order he was "tickled to death," as he himself would have said, had he been asked for an opinion. He had thus far refrained from making any use of his charge, because the enemy persisted in remaining invisible; and a machine-gun is only served at its best when it can be turned upon some crowded passageway where men are jostling one another in the effort to rush things. Its effective value under such conditions can hardly be overrated.

He had been crouching back of the slight shield waiting for orders to take part in the fight; though did the opportunity to break in show itself Harvey would have responded with eagerness.

The fellow close by on his left was already trying to point out the particular tree in question. Even as Harvey looked he saw sudden flashes of fire dart out from amidst the foliage, showing him just where the gunner had taken up his position some twenty feet from the ground, and possibly in some crotch, where he could plant the support of his heavy weapon. (See Note 9.)

Harvey waited for nothing further. He commenced to spray that spot with a rain of lead that would cut branches off and patter against the metal shield of the German gunner in a manner calculated to astonish the fellow.

"Stop firing, Harvey: you've got him, all right!" a voice called, and the energetic marksman recognized his cousin's tones, though harsh with excitement.

The enemy machine-gun barked no more just then. Some of those who had been keeping close watch on the tree were ready to declare they had seen a bulky object come toppling down; but whether this could be the man or his machine gun they were not able to say positively.

This firing continued for the remainder of the night, luckily a fragment of not much more than half an hour. Twice the Germans made a genuine rush, as though bent on carrying the wretched little fort back of the logs by storm.

They were met by such a vicious rifle fire, added to the execution caused by Harvey and his "pet," that the attack broke down. Not nearly as many men in grey-green uniforms went back as had started in each of these advances. The rest lay on the ground, or else crawled painfully away in the endeavour to reach a point beyond the gunfire of the terrible Americans.

Not once was there the slightest effort made by the Americans to prevent the withdrawal of these wounded men. When a man went down he was supposed to be out of the fight; and nothing could have tempted them to try to pick these unfortunates off.

Tom, counting the minutes, cast many an anxious look toward the east, hoping to discover the first signs of coming day. He knew that this hot fire had taken deadly toll of his little force. Instead of twenty-six, leaving out the messenger sent for aid, he could now figure up only a score and four, and several of these had been wounded, though pluckily keeping at their posts.

When finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Tom did actually discover a line of grey through the trees, and realized that the night gloom was being dissipated by the coming sun, he breathed a prayer of thankfulness. It had certainly been a night never to be forgotten, if he lived to get safely out of this scrape, which was as yet very uncertain.

The light grew stronger. For a brief time the firing lessened. But if any of the besieged allowed themselves to feel a sensation of hope that the worst was over they soon realized their mistake, for presently the guns once more began to crackle here, there, and everywhere, as though the Germans had decided to end matters speedily.

It was not long before Sergeant Dorr managed to crawl over to where the lieutenant crouched. He would hardly have taken this trouble unless he had something which he considered of importance to communicate to his superior officer.

Such proved to be the case, for Tom was thrilled to hear Mart say as soon as he came up:

"I have to report, sir, that the enemy is posted on two elevations, one to the south, and the other to the northeast, both of which command our camp. He is even now starting to pick our men off, and we find it hard to keep clear of the bullets coming in from both sides. I think he has some of his best sharpshooters getting busy on us, sir."

"Has anything been done to remedy matters, Sergeant?" asked Tom.

"I gave orders on my own responsibility, sir, to Big Bill Hicksley and two other men who are known to be good shots to try to cut down those fellows on the mounds, but I'm afraid they'll find it a bigger job than they can carry out. You see, sir, they've got rocks up there behind which they can lie, and it's just like hunting for a needle in a haystack as to hope to bowl them all over."

"Are they doing us any harm, Sergeant?" continued Tom, anxiously.

"Three men struck so far, sir, one of them gone, I'm sorry to tell you," replied Mart. "As they are on both sides of us it's simply impossible for our men to keep out of sight; one way they face the log will protect them, but they're also exposed to a raking fire from the rear."

Tom found it necessary to do some rapid thinking just then. The situation as Mart explained it looked serious indeed. They had not known of the presence of those two small elevations at the time

of picking out the camp-site, for darkness had about covered the ground.

It even looked as though they lay in something of a bowl, and those elevated places could be likened to the rim. They afforded the German sharpshooters a great advantage, for without exposing themselves they could by degrees continue to pick off the Americans until they had succeeded in exterminating the lieutenant's force, or else compelled its unconditional surrender.

"We must get out of this, then, that's flat!" Tom presently declared, with a frown upon his face that spoke of annoyance.

Indeed, it was not a very pleasant alternative. If in order to save the detachment from utter annihilation he gave the order for a movement in any direction, it must turn out a desperate effort. They would surely meet with any number of stubborn Germans, all bent on preventing them from escaping the fate that seemed hanging over them.

"Yes, sir?" said the sergeant, encouragingly, as if inviting further orders, he having judged from the last words spoken by Tom that their stay in those shambles would not be of long duration now.

"Pass around the word so that every man can understand, Sergeant, that we are about to move out of here. I shall deeply regret leaving our wounded behind us, but it is impossible to take them

along. Make them as comfortable as you can. Perhaps, who knows, if help arrives before it is too late we may yet be able to come back after the poor chaps. That's all, Sergeant."

"Shall I report back to you when all is ready, sir?"

"Yes, and I myself expect to lead the detachment off, remember, Sergeant!"

It was hard lines that they were thus compelled to shift their base, and under a hot fire at that, but nevertheless Tom had decided rightly. The move was strictly according to military tactics, for when a position ceases to be tenable it must be evacuated without waste of time, no matter what fresh risk may be involved.

They at least would have a fighting chance in a new position, which is all the true soldier asks, and there was certainly none in being compelled to lie where they were and allow those German sharpshooters to cut them down by dribblets, slowly but surely bringing the end nearer and nearer.

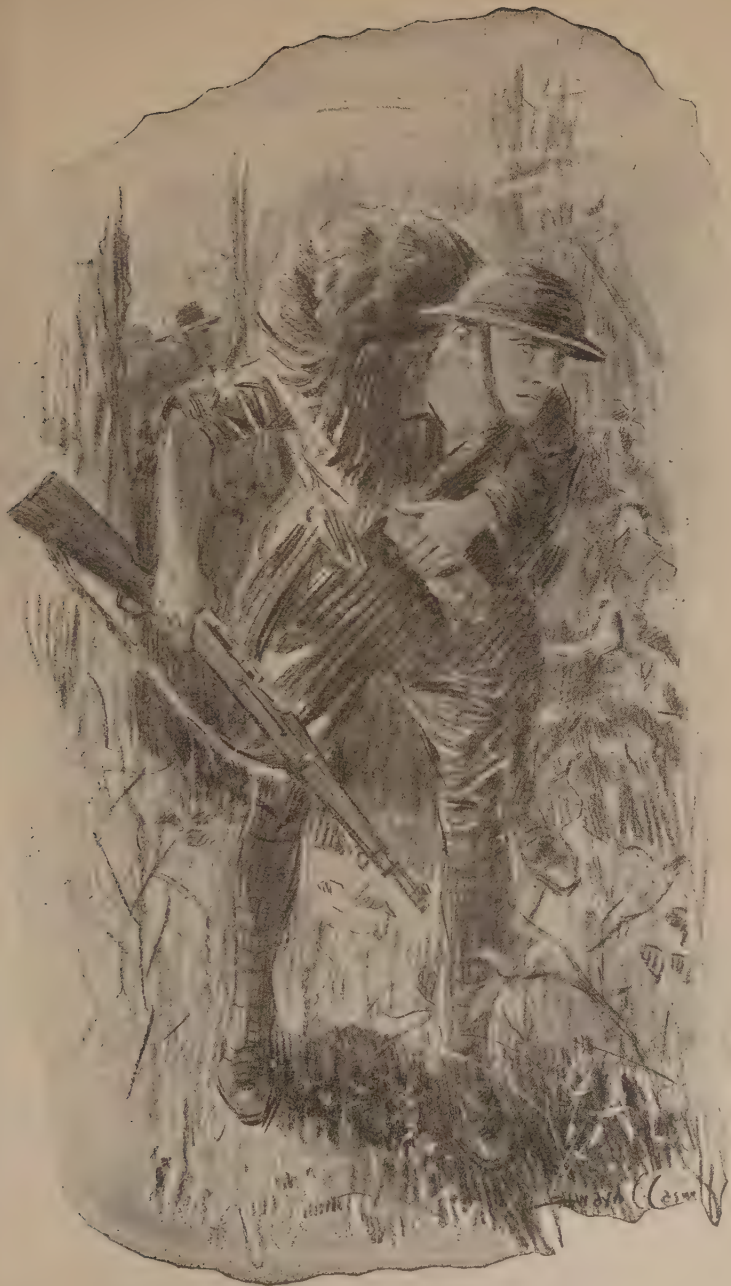
Shortly afterwards again did the sergeant reach his commander to report once more.

"Everything ready for evacuation, sir. And if you please that Big Bill has gone and done it again, sir, cutting down six different Hun marksmen on one of the mounds. The only trouble is there are six more at work. No matter how many you knock

out, strings of others are waiting to take their places. The boys believe there are hundreds of the enemy about us."

"No matter," snapped Tom, grimly, between his set teeth; "if there were ten thousand and I knew it, still that wouldn't change my plan a bit. We couldn't be worse off than we seem to be here in this pocket. They may get us as we rush them; but at least we'll have the satisfaction of knowing we didn't wait for them to come to us!"

"That's the ticket, and I echo your sentiments, sir!" ejaculated Mart, almost forgetting for a moment that he was speaking to his company commander, and not simply a chum whom he had in palmy days of yore been wont to call simply by the name of "Tom."



Harvey was mounted on his broad back

CHAPTER XXXI

A STRANGE REUNION

“GO!”

Above the crackling of the German machine-guns and the hoarse cries of the encircling Huns, twenty-one Americans jumped wildly to their feet, united in a shrill Yankee yell, and dashed straight forward.

Two of this number quickly dropped. They had been previously wounded, to a degree undetermined, but were anxious to take part in this charge to victory or death.

That brought the number down to nineteen, and some of these bore the unmistakable evidence of having come in contact with those plunging bullets that had been showering the camp.

Lieutenant Maillard led the way, with Sergeant Dorr close at his heels. Tom would have scorned to be at the tag-end of such a glorious charge. If a grim fortune decided that he must yield up his young life in the cause of humanity there could not be a more fitting time than now.

Dodging this way and that as they rushed, with bayonets thrust forward as they had been taught in

their army education, the little squad of adventurers quickly came in contact with the enemy.

Burly Germans in their faded green-grey uniforms rose up in front, bent on barring the way of escape. They too had their bayonet thrusts "on tap," and tried their utmost to stop the rush; but they might as well have attempted to stay the mad progress of a whirlwind.

There were crashes as steel smote steel, furious fencing, loud cries, a sudden vanishing of the obstructions, and the line went on, just two less in number because of the upheaval.

Then there came further desultory firing, but evidently the sharpshooters occupying the two mounds were unable to bring their weapons to bear on the retreating Yankees, thanks to Tom's good judgment in choosing his line of passage.

Whither they were going no one knew; even the commander had not the least inkling as to what lay before them. Necessity had compelled them to abandon their former position when they found themselves caught in both flanks by the hot fire from the mounds. No matter what came, it could hardly be as bad as their previous situation.

The wild flight through the forest continued. They had passed over a full quarter of a mile, and Tom still led the way. Mart had been touched twice since leaving camp. He experienced a stinging sensation in his left arm, and it seemed lacking

in feeling, so that only with an effort was he able to make any use of it in firing his rifle.

A passing bullet had also clipped him on the head. Just how serious the injury might be he could not say, though when he put up his hand he found that he was bleeding quite freely. Still, he had not the slightest intention of dropping out of the scrimmage. The idea of being made a prisoner by the Huns was repulsive enough to keep him going, if all else failed.

But their number had been depleted sadly. Only seventeen now followed the leader, ten in all having gone down, wounded or killed, none could more than guess.

They had the proud consciousness of knowing that for every one of the little detachment missing at least four of the enemy, perhaps many times that number, had been put out of the fight.

Harvey had been compelled of course to abandon his machine-gun, since it could not very well be taken along in that mad race. He felt very disconsolate over having lost it, but the thing could not be helped.

Then Mart had a shock. He heard his cousin, whom he loved like a younger brother, give a cry. It meant he had finally been struck by one of those flying missiles.

The entire detachment, already out of breath, stopped as if by mutual consent. This pause afforded them a chance to turn and send a volley at

the pursuing Germans that caused a quick cessation of the chase as the survivors sought shelter with ludicrous haste.

Harvey was down, with Mart bending over him.

"It's my leg!" explained the younger Dorr boy, with a look of infinite disgust on his face. "A bullet got me, and I can't run a step! But go on, the rest of you; don't stay here! You can't help me, and will only get knocked out yourselves. Go on, I tell you, Martin!"

For reply the sergeant stooped still lower. His arms went out to encircle his cousin, his object evidently being to get Harvey on his back somehow, just as on that other occasion he had carried off the poor lad in his patrol who had fallen during the raid between the lines.

Then Mart groaned as though his heart were broken. Try as he might it proved to be utterly impossible for him to raise Harvey; not that the other was such a tremendous weight, but that Mart's wounded arm absolutely refused to serve him as had always been its custom.

A hand gripped Mart's shoulder, and he found himself rudely jerked back. He looked up into the face of the former camp bully, Big Bill Hicksley. At that moment, a real crisis in the lives of Mart and Harvey Dorr, that heavy red face seemed transformed. Once they had thought it ugly with its leering expression, but that was long ago, before

Big Bill had tasted of the exquisite delight of popular esteem.

"Get back, Sarg!" he cried gruffly; "you ain't fit to carry a cat, with that arm of yours. I'll look after that kid cousin, and get him safe out of this. I reckon I owe him that much. Here, youngster, put your arms around my neck; you're agoin' to move, I tell you, and right quick at that."

In a couple of seconds he straightened up. Harvey was mounted on his broad back, both arms clasped around that bull-like neck, though with one of his legs dangling helplessly down.

Tom saw all this, but it was no time for making remarks, or in fact attempting anything save a continuance of their flight. The Germans were recovering from their setback, and the firing was beginning again, and the bullets began to sing spitefully around them.

"Come on, everybody, we're off!" sang out Mart, as the lieutenant led the way.

So they kept going, though the danger did not immediately decrease, and it seemed as though some of their enemies were bound to follow doggedly in the rear, as though determined to learn where the remnant of the detachment would eventually bring up.

As the immediate danger had simmered down to a considerable degree, Tom now experienced a lively interest in what might lie ahead of them. They

could not keep up this furious pace much longer. Unless some place of temporary refuge were reached they must soon find themselves face to face with an overwhelming mass of foes, before whose furious assault his diminished force would quickly melt away as the snow does in the warm April sunshine.

It can therefore be easily understood how anxiously Tom was straining his eyes to look ahead. If only some favourable location would come in sight, where they could again plant themselves with at least some chance of holding the enemy in check, looking to the coming of assistance! That was the one eager thought chasing through Tom's mind.

Counting the wounded Harvey they only numbered twelve now besides himself. One by one the others had been cut down. It was like the waters wearing away the solid rock by continual fretting; and this could not keep up very much longer, he feared.

Then Tom felt a sudden spasm of joy shoot through his being. Could that be a woodman's log-hut he glimpsed, half hidden under the trees just in line with their flight? Unable to believe fully his own eyes, he managed to half turn his head, and shout at Mart, plodding along close behind:

"Look there, Mart! Tell me, is that a hut under that big tree? Don't you see?"

Mart, thrilled by his words, tried his best to corroborate the hopeful discovery, but his vision was

not as clear as usual, for drops of blood from the nasty cut in his head were partly blinding him.

"I can't see halfway decent, Tom; but I think it must be!" he managed to reply, tremendously excited at the prospect of a quick cessation of their furious flight.

Tom had not slackened his pace, but was still plunging onward. Before he had gone a dozen yards he hastened to inform the other that now there could not be the slightest doubt left.

"Yes, it's a hut, all right, Mart!" he shouted, joyously. "Just the sort of thing we need to hang out in. Ahead, everybody, with a will; we can make it easily. Bill, can I spell you?" this last to the private who was bringing up the rear, running with the rest just as though Harvey's weight did not amount to anything worth mentioning.

"Naw — don't need any help, Lieutenant!" snapped Big Bill between his set teeth; and yet he was as fiery red in the face as Mart had ever seen the wattles of the big turkey-gobbler over home on his father's country place.

"Oh, look! The old hut is occupied!" called out Dick Rouse, the same Dick who had been quite chummy with Harvey in the past, and who fortunately enough for him seemed to have escaped injury up to that moment.

"They may be some of the Huns who'll hold the fort against us!" wildly speculated another of the

runners, as the little detachment almost came to a sudden halt.

"They're coming out, and starting this way!" called Dick immediately afterwards. "See how they wave their hands and shout, will you? Why, what's this mean? They're calling in good English too — and as I live, that tall gaunt chap in front is shrieking the name of our commander."

"Tom, oh! Tom Maillard, don't you know us?" came from the runner, who was being followed by three others, while a woman stood in the doorway. "We're the Bartletts and the Caslons, all of us here, and crazy to see you!"

Could a more dramatic meeting ever be imagined? After all, the world did not seem so very large to Tom and Mart and Harvey just then. The whole battle line from the Swiss border to the sea might be scores and scores of miles in length, and yet by almost a miracle they had come face to face with those who had been in their minds so much of late.

In another moment they were embracing one another, perfectly wild with delight.

CHAPTER XXXII

BEHIND LOG WALLS

THERE was, however, no time to waste. The pursuing Germans would soon be coming up in force, bent on finishing the work of wiping out the lost detachment, already so terribly shot to pieces.

After wringing each other's hands with vim, the boys seemed to understand that it would be folly to stand there taking chances.

"We must crowd inside the hut, men!" called out the lieutenant. "Let Bill go ahead with his load; we're all taking off our hats to Bill just now, I tell you, and if he isn't wearing chevrons before long I miss my guess!"

Big Bill gave him one look that was more eloquent than many words could ever have been; for it expressed the glorified feeling that filled his heart. And Tom knew right then and there the regeneration of the former camp bully had been made complete. Bill had seen a great light, and tasted of the joys of appreciation.

They quickly reached the old hut, where Mrs. Caslon soundly kissed each of the three youths of

her acquaintance in turn, crying with gladness all the while. Her happiest dreams seemed about to come true in this wonderful hour. After all those miserable months of captivity, how thrilling it was to meet the three former friends from whom she and her twin boys and the Bartletts had parted on that bright day in July more than four years before!

Tom, being first a soldier and then a fellow American of the forest fugitives, had taken stock of their means of defence as soon as he arrived at the hut. To his satisfaction he discovered that there was a fairly stout door, which seemed capable of resisting considerable pressure from without.

"Fetch those two short sections of log inside," he told some of his men. "They'll serve to barricade the door, and it's likely will come in handy."

Meanwhile Bill had laid Harvey down as gently as possible. It was surprising to see how solicitous the big fellow seemed concerning his charge. Had Harvey been a boon companion, instead of the boy formerly despised by Bill he could not have been more careful, more considerate.

Mart ignored his own injuries, which he believed to be superficial. He was greatly concerned about Harvey, and proceeded to examine the wound as well as the conditions allowed. Tom, too, hovered near, and Mrs. Caslon seemed eager to be of any possible assistance; although without appliances as they were, it did not seem that much could be done.

Mart looked up presently. The anxious expression was partly gone from his face, Tom could quickly see.

"It's a bad hurt, all right," announced Mart, gravely; "but I'm glad to say it doesn't seem to be bleeding quite so much; and I can soon put a stop to that with a tourniquet."

"Let me help you there, Mart," interjected Thomas Bartlett. "You know I used to be something of a fair hand at all kinds of surgery when I belonged to the Boy Scouts, and picked up first aid treatment so readily. Yes, and my chief boast used to be of my ability to apply a tourniquet in case of a bad ax wound, while we were in camp."

Tom, as the commander in charge of the detachment, of course knew it to be his duty to give orders looking to holding out against the attack they must soon expect to come.

He would have liked very much to ask a score of natural questions concerning the appearance of these old friends in this section of the Argonne Forest when he had believed them many miles away, possibly in the heart of Germany proper; but all that could await a more favourable opportunity. A stern necessity confronted them since their lives were still at stake, and the future seemed most uncertain.

He only hoped this meeting might prove to be a happy augury, and that these friends, after all their

trials and discomforts, had not arrived thus far on the road to freedom only to meet with overwhelming disaster.

He could already hear shots being fired outside as some of their late pursuers came within sight of the hut, to learn that the remnant of the American force had sought temporary refuge within.

When he heard the unmistakable thud of bullets striking the logs composing the thick walls of the charcoal-burners' hut, Tom found himself comparing their present condition with that of the old pioneer families on the Ohio, in the days of Daniel Boone, when the Indians roved the woods, and attacked the rude homes of the venturesome settlers.

Indeed, there was considerable similarity, since the shelter in which they stood at bay was also a log cabin somewhat like those erected by the river settlers wherever they squatted. Yes, and Tom thought the Huns without might reasonably be compared with those savage tribes whose cruelty and love of torture had made them both hated and feared.

"How are we going to get a chance to knock over some of them fellers out there, Lieutenant?" Big Bill asked; for he had somehow managed to retain possession of his rifle, even when carrying Harvey on his back, and held the weapon now, eager to make good use of it.

"Find openings between the logs, where the dried

mud has broken away," Tom told him; "and make holes if you can't find what you want!"

"That's easy!" declared Bill, as he hastened to push up against the nearest wall; and a moment later he was digging furiously with the point of his knife, making the hard mud, almost like cement, fly in every direction.

Others seeing what he was doing hastened to copy his example; so that as many as half a dozen of them soon had small openings or "chinks" between the walls, some on one side, and others taking the opposite quarter.

Big Bill was the first to thrust his gun part way through the aperture he had made. He was seen to take a quick look, and then the stunning crash of his rifle made Mrs. Caslon give a little squeal of alarm.

Tom, interested in knowing what the result of this first shot might be, glued his eye to a diminutive opening he discovered, and was just in time to see a German soldier reeling about. He presently fell with a crash, announcing the fact that Big Bill was keeping up his reputation as being the champion sharpshooter of the company.

Ten minutes afterwards things had become exceedingly warm. Scores of the enemy force had come up and more were constantly arriving. Doubtless they were bent on wiping out the entire detachment. Such a chance to clean up a force of

Americans had not come their way very often, and the harder Tom and his men fought the more grimly were those Huns determined to stay by them, and complete the business.

The shots came in so fast and furious that it sounded almost as though a regular battle were in progress. There was always the possibility that a bullet would find its way through one of those small openings, and doing some serious damage, but this peril could not be avoided.

"Don't waste ammunition!" warned the commander, fearing that some of the defenders of the wretched fort might be growing a bit reckless. "We'll need every cartridge before we're through with this job. Make each bullet count, boys!"

"They're getting ready to make a rush, Tom, I imagine," said Mart just at that moment.

He had managed to fasten a handkerchief around his head. It already showed ugly stains that gave Mart quite a savage look, but at least it kept him from being blinded as before. A hasty examination of his left arm at the hands of Thomas had disclosed the fact that no bone was broken by the passing bullet, a fact that encouraged Mart exceedingly.

Thomas had tied the arm up in a crude fashion, promising better treatment when the patient had more time at his disposal. On the whole things were looking much brighter for Mart, now that the

feeling of dread with regard to Harvey no longer gripped his faithful heart.

"How do you know that, Mart?" demanded the lieutenant, on hearing what his sergeant had to say.

"I have seen them gathering in three different places," continued the other, without hesitation; "and it's easy to guess what that means. They expect to make the big push at a signal, thinking they'll get off lightly, because, you see, we can't shoot fast enough to hold them all in check."

"Yes, the old Indian tactics over again," mused Tom; "only they used to creep up to the settler's cabin through the long grass, or by using a log as we would an armoured car in these days. After that they'd set the cabin on fire, often by shooting arrows tipped with flame at the roof. Don't you see, Mart, the world is still pretty much the same as it was in those old days of pioneer life?"

"But say, I hope those beasts won't try to set this old hut on fire!" remarked Mart, looking concerned at the thought. "It's as dry as punk, I do believe, and would burn briskly. I wouldn't put anything past these Huns, Tom; burning houses seems to be their long suit over in Belgium, and throughout Northern France."

"Yes, we've seen hundreds that have been treated that way," Tom replied. "Let's hope the idea doesn't chance to occur to them. As for trying to

stop the rush they mean to make, I don't suppose we can do it. At best we'll be able to bowl over a few of the runners, if there's any satisfaction in that game."

"Every one counts in the long run," observed Mart, as he heard Big Bill's rifle speak again; and somehow no one seemed to have the least doubt concerning the result every time Bill pulled trigger, such was his enviable reputation as a marksman.

Mart's prediction came true, for inside of ten minutes one of the defenders of the wood hut yelled at the top of his voice:

"Here they come in a bunch, the whole lot of 'em!"

"Just as many on this side, too!" cried another boy in khaki, as he fired through the small opening that had served also as a peephole.

There was a general fusillade within and without. Mrs. Caslon, crouching in the corner alongside Harvey, drew the two little French children closer into her arms. She was white in the face, yet was bearing up wonderfully well, considering all she had gone through and the fact that her two boys were there. They, to their regret, were unable to take any important part in the battle unless one of their comrades should fall, and thus a gun be released.

Then heavy blows sounding on the door told that the assailants had arrived under the walls of their rude fort.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT THE POINT OF THE BAYONET

HAD Tom allowed himself to turn back again to his history lessons he must have once more been forcibly reminded of the similarity between their predicament and that of the old-time settlers whom he had mentioned when speaking to Mart.

All that heavy hammering at the door with stones and gun-butts might well resemble the frantic efforts of the painted warriors in their efforts to force an entrance to the cabins where the pioneer family, father, mother, and children, so valiantly battled for their lives.

After all, brute tactics are pretty much the same in these enlightened days as when the world was much younger. Finding that the door resisted these first assaults, the Huns without set about other tactics.

"They're getting that big log, Tom! They expect to smash in the door with it, I do believe!" cried Mart, turning around after withdrawing his eye from the nearest crevice.

"Oh, if only I had my machine-gun now!" Harvey ejaculated, dolefully. "Mebbe I wouldn't cut

a fine swath through the bunch when they tried to break in here!"

There was no use of "crying over spilt milk," as Harvey himself would be the first to say. The machine-gun had to be abandoned, so they must do the best possible without it.

Already the wild shouts of the excited Germans without told how confident they were feeling. In that huge log they saw a battering-ram that might be depended on to clear the way to the interior of the hut. And once they came face to face with the little body of defenders, their superior numbers would surely give them the victory.

This was bad enough for an outlook, but there was worse still to come, as Tom soon discovered. He noticed that two of the men while peering out eagerly did not seem to be using their guns with the idea of cutting down the enemy's forces.

"What's keeping you from firing, men?" he demanded, possibly suspecting the truth, yet hoping it might not be so serious as all that.

"Last cartridge in the gun, sir; I was holding that for the rush!" replied one of the pair, looking plainly worried, as well he might, over the desperate character of their situation.

"And you?" snapped Tom, turning to the second soldier.

"I've got three shots left, sir; and thought I'd

better hold 'em a bit. They may help to choke up the doorway, you see, Lieutenant."

Tom felt as though a chilly hand had come in contact with his heart. It was certainly hard lines when such a slender hope seemed to be the best they could expect. Choking the doorway would never save them. When those wild Huns started to crowd through the gap they had made they were not to be held in check by such a simple device.

"All right, but make up your minds you'll have to depend more on bayonet work than anything else, boys," he told the pair.

With that they moved over so as to get closer to the door, as though meaning to be in the front line when the crisis arrived. No one could do anything more than they were now attempting. They were all heroes, every one, Tom told himself, as he watched them going so grimly about their business, with set jaws, and that steady gleam in their eyes that told of the unquenchable fire burning in their hearts.

Then came a mighty crash. The first blow had been given with the weighty log, urged forward by a dozen of the Huns without. It shook the whole hut with the force of the impact, but still the door did not give way. Considerable more power would be needed in order to accomplish the demolition of that stout barrier.

Still, this was not a thing to inspire any great degree of hope. Simply by going back further so as to gain more impetus would bring about better results, Tom knew only too well.

If they only had that machine-gun at hand, how different things might be! With it playing on the mob the swinging of that log must have been rendered utterly impossible; for the double row of soldiers could have been cut down as easily as a farmer with his scythe and cradle mows the tall ripe grain.

Given time, perhaps one of the defenders might have hatched up some plan whereby the enemy could be persuaded to abandon their purpose, for the American mind is usually fertile with resources. But the emergency was already upon them, and allowed of no figuring out of schemes.

Then there came another fearful smash. The log battering-ram had again come up against the door, this time with accelerated force. Though Big Bill and several of the others managed to work their rifles effectively while the rush was forming, the dropping out of several Huns did not appear to make any particular difference.

"It can't stand another smash like that one, Tom!" exclaimed Mart, as he saw the splinters flying from the partly wrecked door.

"Get ready to meet them with cold steel, boys!" called the lieutenant. "Americans can die at their posts, but they don't surrender, remember!"

There was not so much of boasting about that last sentence as might appear on the surface. So many terrible stories had been told in the camps concerning the horrible prison life of those unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the Huns — how they were ill-treated, and half starved — that nearly every man had sworn he would sooner die than allow himself to be taken captive.

From the loud shouts that arose it appeared as though the attacking force anticipated an easy victory, now that they had started the door on its way. Their losses had been so heavy, thanks to the accurate rifle-fire of this handful of Yankee soldiers, that they were furious, and fairly wild to finish the party then and there.

Tom cast a last quick glance around as though to impress that marvellous spectacle upon his mind for ever. Surely he could never forget it, if by the favour of fortune he managed to come through the adventure with his life.

There were those stern-faced boys in khaki, many of them bleeding from painful wounds, yet betraying no sign of surrender as they waited for the closing scene in the tragic drama. Thomas and the French aviator had secured guns from two of the others, too weak from loss of blood to make any further use of them, while Frank, Paul and Henry crouched in front of Mrs. Caslon and the children just as if they had made up their minds to offer their

bodies in their defence when the cruel and remorseless Huns broke in.

Mrs. Caslon had her eyes closed. Tom believed she must be praying that in this their most critical hour some mighty power would intercede, so as to spare the lives of her two dear boys. And they on their part had no thought for themselves, but only that she might be protected from harm.

It was a fateful moment. No doubt those carriers of the battering ram had already retreated again in order to gain fresh impetus, so that their next effort might bring about the force required to break down the strong door.

A strange silence had fallen both within and without. Tom was reminded of a time when a terrible storm was raging, and all of a sudden the furious wind held up, the rain ceased, and even the crashing thunder seemed stilled, but only to start afresh with renewed energy after the respite.

He could almost in imagination see that double row of bulky men in the grey-green of the Kaiser's soldiers starting on the double-quick, with increasing speed as they neared the cabin. Then would come the last crash, with the shattered barrier flying backward.

"Keep clear of the door, everybody!" Tom shouted, thinking some of them were hovering dangerously near; for when the log and some of its

holders came thrusting through the gap it would be unsafe to remain in the way.

Big Bill whirled around. His change of base told that he saw no further opportunity to utilize his rifle by firing through the chinks. Next in order would be bayonet work.

The tableau was speedily broken, and rudely at that, for with a tremendous crash the log came against the already tottering door. Just as Tom had anticipated, unable longer to resist such force the barrier gave way. Log, door, and several of the Huns came through the opening in a heap, amidst the wildest of cries from the mob without, unable to get through the narrow gap as speedily as they in their eagerness and greed wished.

Then began the last act in the drama. Mrs. Caslon hid her face back of her hands, just as she had done on that previous occasion when the battle in the clouds had resulted in one aviator coming down to his death. Such scenes were more than she dared gaze upon. Still she did not let go of the two trembling and silent children.

Big Bill had pushed himself into the very front rank, as though he usurped that position by right of his bulk and muscular superiority; nor did any one of those former scoffing comrades dream of considering him a usurper for showing such greed. Bill was only proving that he had it in him to make a

hero, given such a glorious chance as now confronted him.

The conflict raged from the very instant the door fell and the van-guard of the enemy burst into the hut. They suffered grievously under the bayonet thrusts of the Americans, for staggering with their entry the Huns found themselves in anything but a good condition to use their own guns.

Sooner or later the end seemed certain, for when an American went down there was no way of stopping the gap; while several Germans waited without to replace every loss within the hut.

Tom, fighting desperately with a gun he had snatched up, dropped by one of the first Huns to break through, saw that at the best they could only prolong the agony; but still he refused to surrender. And it is possible that even though he had ordered his men to throw up their arms, as the Germans usually did when they cried "Kamerad" none would have obeyed his command, so filled with fiery zeal and determination to die fighting had they become.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE RESCUE

POOR Harvey, what agonies of mind and body he suffered! His heart was in the conflict that was raging so furiously so near him; and yet he found himself utterly incapable of having a share in it.

Hard luck that he should have received that injury to his leg, rendering him absolutely helpless in so far as getting around was concerned! With his comrades, Henry and Paul, attempting to shield him, and Mrs. Caslon too, he found it difficult to catch even a glimpse of what was going on.

It was useless to cry out and beseech them to let him see, for with all that dreadful clamour going on they could not have heard; or if they did hear, manage to understand what he wanted. So Harvey could only sit still, groaning with impotence, and awaiting the course of events.

There could not be the slightest doubt about the ultimate result should the defenders of the forest hut be compelled to depend upon their own unaided efforts. The Germans were already five to one, with more arriving constantly, like buzzards flocking to the feast.

Tom, battling with the rest, had great difficulty in keeping up a brave heart. Indeed, all of them were fighting in pure desperation, without any real expectation that they could by any possibility come off victors in the *mêlée*.

Already several of their number had been overcome, no one knew how badly injured. And still those who were left fought stubbornly on with the true American grit that will not yield so long as life remains.

Paul had been quick to see an opportunity to get into the fight. When there came the first vacancy in the ranks of the defenders he darted forward, and in another instant had snatched up the fallen man's gun.

True, that gun was useless save as a club, for it contained no charge, the former owner having fired his very last remaining cartridge directly into the faces of the crowd trying to surge through the doorway. But Paul had seen how his comrade Thomas was using the rifle he had seized, and it would be a poor specimen of Yankee lad who could not imitate such an example.

Frank quickly followed Paul into the actual fighting; and it was not long before Henry, too, saw his chance. He proved himself equal to the emergency, though his was not the same sturdy build as his more energetic brother Paul.

Tom Maillard made a sudden discovery. He

could see a difference in the crush at the door; the onrush had begun to grow less determined, and the space there was now less crowded. More than that, he noticed that several of the Germans forming the outer rim of the enemy forces showed signs of extreme uneasiness.

When Tom witnessed a hurried withdrawal of two men he began to entertain a thrilling suspicion. Now he could catch the sound of loud shouting outside, shouting in the German language. It was almost immediately drowned by a singular roaring sound not unlike near by thunder.

Tom's heart leaped with hope! He hardly dared believe it could be true, but when he saw others of the Huns turn and dash madly out of the hut he no longer doubted the glorious truth.

"Hurrah! Help has come, boys!" he shouted, with all the power he could summon to the joyous task. "Keep fighting, and throw the last Hun out of the door! Listen to that, will you; a true Yankee cheer!"

His last words were drowned in another roaring sound, as though hundreds of guns had been discharged in a mighty salvo. That quelled the ardour of the remaining Germans. Though they may have been slow of comprehension when doggedly fighting, they could not very well misunderstand the meaning of that cheer. Never did their kind go into battle with such soul-stirring enthusiasm.

So there was a frantic scramble to see who would be the first to leave the forest hut. Tom and his men did not feel disposed to stop their flight; indeed, they were only too delighted to see them depart, being sadly winded, and most of them bleeding freely from various wounds.

To the door Tom made his way, stepping over those who encumbered the dirt floor of the woodman's hut. Mrs. Caslon was still on her knees, an arm thrown about each of the little French children, her white lips moving as though in fervid thanksgiving because of Heaven's answer to her prayer.

The French aviator captain, who had given a good account of himself considering his crippled condition, was bending over one of the fallen Americans, and putting a battered tin-cup filled with cool water to his lips. He seemed to feel the utmost gratitude toward the great Nation beyond the sea that had so nobly responded to the most urgent call of France, and had hastened to help bind up the wounds of the stricken republic that had suffered so grievously at the hands of the invading Hun armies.

When Tom looked out his heart sang with joy to see the wood fairly swarming with men in khaki, who were taking snap-shots at the fleeing Germans, and apparently enjoying the potting vastly.

It looked as though an entire regiment had reached the scene just as the crisis came on. Had their

coming been delayed ten minutes longer the chances were they must have arrived only to find the drama closed, and none of the little party left alive.

Now a party of officers came hurrying up, and Tom discovered that the leading one wore the silver leaf of a colonel on his shoulders, while several others composing the group were majors and captains.

So, standing stiffly just outside the doorway, the lieutenant threw up his hand in salute. He looked grim and gory just then, but his pale face had on it a proud expression, as of one who knew his duty had been done to the uttermost and that there could be no word of reprimand coming to him.

"What's been going on here, Lieutenant?" asked the colonel. "You seem to have been hotly engaged, and holding off ten times your number."

Already several men who Tom saw were connected with the hospital units were hurrying up, as though filled with a desire to do what was possible for the wounded inside the hut, especially those who wore the khaki, though Germans would also come in for attention in good time.

"My command became wanderers in the forest, sir. In the fighting we lost touch with our regiment in the mist, and have been trying ever since to find ourselves again. The Germans were everywhere, and you see all that are left of the twenty-seven

men who were with me in the start. But, sir, I assure you we have left a trail of dead Germans behind us wherever we went."

"I am certain of that, Lieutenant, if what I can see here is any indication of what has gone before!" heartily declared the colonel, shaking Tom's hand as he spoke. "But you are all right now, sir. We have several ambulances trailing after us, and your wounded will be taken care of. They deserve the best there is, for I am certain every man of them has proved himself a hero."

Tom was not satisfied even at that.

"We have left others, wounded and dead, back in the forest, Colonel," he went on to say; "and I could not consider my duty completed until I had hunted them up, every man, if only I may be given a detail for that purpose."

"That can be easily arranged," he was assured. "None of you are in condition to undertake such a task now. Leave it to me, and I assure you, sir, not a single man shall be neglected. The wounded will be taken to the rear, and those who are beyond help buried where they fell. And, Lieutenant, you must give me your name, so I can make my report of this remarkable scene."

Tom had hardly done this before the others came out of the hut, Mrs. Caslon with them. Apparently the Yankee colonel was considerably astonished to find an American lady there, as well as several likely

young fellows who were not wearing the khaki, and two children.

“This is Mrs. Caslon, Colonel, with her two sons, Paul and Henry,” explained Tom, at which the officers all raised their trench caps respectfully. “With Thomas and Frank Bartlett they have been held in prison camps in Austria and Germany ever since the war started. We came upon them here in a most unexpected way, for they had made a break for liberty, and were hiding in this hut when we reached it. And this French officer is an air pilot whose machine fell with him after he had sent down a German plane. My friends here looked after his injuries and he concluded to share their fortunes in the hope of getting back to his aviation headquarters.”

Then Tom told of the finding of the two little French children by the party of fugitives, and of their determination to see that they should be sent to Paris where proper care would be taken of them.

“All very interesting, Lieutenant, and I wish I could spare more time to inquire further concerning your adventures,” remarked the colonel; “but we must push on in order to make our objective today. Depend on it, Captain Blunt whom I will detach from my staff, to stop over with you, will be given orders to leave nothing undone looking to your comfort.

"Madam, I sincerely trust that your troubles are now all in the past," he added.

With that the gallant officer saluted Mrs. Caslon, conferred for a brief time with several of his staff, and then the party moved off. Tom noticed that they were going due north, from which fact he found reason to believe that the redemption of the entire Argonne Forest was in progress, with the enemy being driven constantly backward.

Captain Blunt assumed charge without delay. He proved to be the right sort of man for the occasion, as undoubtedly the colonel knew would be the case.

First of all the injured must be looked after, and in this all of them could be useful. Mrs. Caslon insisted on taking a share of this work upon herself. She was no trained nurse, but knew something about caring for minor cuts, and how to staunch the flow of blood.

"I am so filled with gratitude," she told Tom when he showed signs of insisting that she leave this unpleasant business to others who could; perhaps, better stand the strain of such scenes, "that I feel I must show it by doing something for these men and boys who have shed their blood in this splendid defence. So please let me assist as far as I am able."

Of course after that Tom could not refuse, for he saw it would make her unhappy to be left out of

the sanitary corps. Mart, too, found a chance to take a look at his wounds, for Harvey insisted on it.

"You've all been kind to me," the latter said, "and now it's time you considered others. There's Big Bill, too, trying to bandage his arm where he got a nasty jab from a Hun bayonet. Please, please see that he has attention, Tom, because I owe my life to Bill, though he makes so little of what he did."

CHAPTER XXXV

A SURPRISE FOR MART

"IT looks like the whole bunch of us will have to visit a field hospital for repairs," Big Bill was heard to say, with a chuckle as of amusement, as Mart insisted on helping him bandage his arm. "That crazy Hun got by my guard, and gave me a beauty of a jab; but I guess I fixed *him* all right!"

Mart somehow seemed to be of the same opinion. Perhaps had Harvey chanced to notice the sudden flush crossing his cousin's face he might have entertained a suspicion that the idea of having to visit a hospital again would not be so very displeasing to Mart — especially if it happened to be the one back of the lines with which the sergeant was already familiar.

As for Big Bill, he actually looked happy. Why should he not when deep down in his heart he had the proud consciousness of having done his duty by his flag, and at the same time wiped out the old score run up during the time when he had been scorned by every decent fellow as the camp bully?

Every time he caught the eyes of Harvey fastened on him Bill nodded back. His feelings toward the

"kid" had apparently taken a complete reversal; indeed, after having been instrumental in carrying the boy over the last section of the retreat he must have felt that he had an interest in Harvey such as perhaps he had never before felt toward a living being.

In truth Big Bill had begun to live and to see things at their true value. He would from that time forward look with aversion upon pleasures that in the past had appealed to him. And toward Lieutenant Maillard his feeling of hostility had changed to one of sincere admiration, for had he not seen the other stand up bravely and show his colours?

Nor would Big Bill be apt to forget those encouraging words which Tom had spoken about seeing to it that the chevrons of a sergeant decorated his sleeve before many days had passed. Ambition had already begun to grip that hitherto callous heart, and Bill was entertaining hopes of surprising his home folks when he eventually should burst in upon them, wearing the insignia of honour and ability and a nation's trust.

There was much to be done, and Tom gladly consulted with Captain Blunt, whom he found to be a most accommodating fellow. When the ambulances came along the road that led through the forest near by, they were hailed and orders given to load up with the wounded.

Already temporary treatment had been given to

all who were in need of it, so that they might be able to hold out until the hospital could be reached.

"How will you be off for room in the ambulances, Captain?" Tom asked. "Do you suppose it would be possible for my friends here to occupy seats with the drivers? They are very anxious to get to Paris; particularly Mrs. Caslon, though she declares she will not go across seas while this war lasts, if she can be of any use in a hospital. The boys are all determined to join our fighting forces, and do their share in bringing Germany to her knees."

"I believe there will be no difficulty about accommodating them," Captain Blunt assured him. "There will be three ambulances going. I think we can find room on the seats for your friends, at least as far as the field hospital."

"Thank you very much, Captain," said Tom, shaking the other's hand gratefully. "It means a whole lot to these poor folks, who have already suffered greatly. And if there is enough space possibly you might also allow the gallant French aviator, whom I have myself not had a chance to meet and chat with up to the present, to accompany us."

"Suit yourself, Lieutenant," said the other. "If there is a spare seat he is entirely welcome to occupy it. We are brothers to the French now, as never before. This war has united Britain, France and

America as nothing else could have done; for their boys have mingled their blood with ours in the same noble cause."

Their prospects were beginning to grow brighter now, and Tom was forcibly reminded of the truth of that old saying, "It is always darkest before dawn."

"Just to think," he observed to Mart, when they chanced to run across each other, "only half an hour ago none of us believed we should ever live to see our native land again. But Heaven was kind, and now like magic everything is changed. None of our little party has gone under, though all of us have been touched, and need attention before we can hope to get back in the line again."

"How are we going to get Mrs. Caslon and the French children and the boys out of here, Tom?" asked Mart, proving that he too had been worrying himself concerning the solution of this problem.

"I've arranged all that with Captain Blunt," Tom assured him. "There'll be room on the seats of the three ambulances for all, even the French aviator, whom I have not had the pleasure of meeting so far."

"You must ride with him, then, Tom," continued the sergeant, dropping all formality when alone with his old chum. "You see, Thomas told me none of them could chat with him because they knew

so little French and he, on his part, could not speak English. But you are a good French scholar, you and Lucille."

"Let him understand then, he is welcome to go along with us," Tom further directed, at which the other immediately started off.

The French aviator had been watching the others gather around. He seemed to divine that they would be given a chance to ride on the seats of the ambulances.

Mart quickly gave him to understand that he would be welcome to accompany them to the American lines, from which point, of course, it would not be so very difficult to reach his own quarters with the French army that was working in close touch with Pershing's men.

Accordingly, this fact having been communicated to the pilot through means mostly of suggestive signs, he nodded his head as though to signify that he comprehended; after which he darted into the hut.

Thomas, seeing him go, understood. There were the instruments which the pilot had saved from the wreck of his smashed machine. He considered them valuable, both in a monetary sense and also through association, and would wish to take them along with him, to be used again when he took charge of another battleplane.

Yes, there he was coming out of the hut now,

with the binoculars slung across his shoulder, and the rest of his possessions bunched under an arm.

Tom had started to install Mrs. Caslon, the children and the boys upon the seats of the ambulances whose drivers were only too willing to cramp themselves in order to accommodate the fugitives. He beckoned to the French pilot, as though to signify that there was also room for him.

Mart, walking along at the side of the aviator, saw Tom suddenly fasten his eyes on the binoculars. But then, as he and Harvey well knew, that had lately become a settled habit with the other, for he could never see a Frenchman carrying such an article without being seized with a wild hope that fortune was at last favouring him.

Mart, believing that, as in numberless previous cases, Tom was only in for a grievous disappointment, was considerably astonished to see the lieutenant after replying to the salute of the French officer suddenly reach out his hand and take hold of the case containing the dangling binoculars.

He whipped this open without as much as "by your leave," and fastened a beaming look on the well-used glasses contained therein. Then he addressed himself to the officer, who was naturally considerably surprised.

"Pardon, but permit me to ask, are you not Captain Maurice Declosis?"

Mart caught the name and understood, even as

he whipped his gaze around to the pilot, just in time to see him nod his head in the affirmative, and give what must have been an assenting reply.

At that Tom simply looked at Mart. But, oh, the significance contained in that single glance! Mart, still dazed, could hardly grasp the truth. It seemed more than a miracle that after all his searching far and wide for Captain Declosis, Tom should actually run across the man in this amazing fashion.

"The dinner is on me, Tom, I can plainly see!" he did manage to exclaim, weakly, when he could catch his breath again.

"And don't forget," said Tom, though his face belied his assumption of severity, "that there will be considerable of a crowd present whenever you have the pleasure of settling for that spread, seeing that the Caslons and the Bartletts have come out of their German prison camp, and will be with us on that joyous occasion."

"I'll be only too glad because of it," said Mart, stoutly, though he at the same time realized what a price he would have to pay in consequence of having held the wrong end of the wager.

Of course Captain Declosis was densely ignorant of what all this meant; but then Tom would take advantage of their sitting on the same seat while on the way back through the Argonne Forest to enlighten him.

"I shall hate to deprive such a brave aviator of



"And so you've been at it again, have you, Mart?" asked Lucile

the binoculars," Tom told himself, "but he can be supplied with others; and somehow I feel that after all my worry over that pair I must have them again."

Soon they were ready to depart. Captain Blunt, who had lingered with his little detachment of men to see them off, waved a farewell, and immediately turning, hastened after his comrades.

The three ambulances started on the return journey. The road was nothing to boast of, and great care had to be taken in order not to unduly jostle the poor fellows lying inside. But then, after all, there was no comparison between this trail and some of the main highways which had been blasted by shells and blown up purposely by the retreating Huns with the hope of checking the pursuit.

On the way Tom managed to have an interesting conversation with the French aviator. Of course he explained his peculiar interest in the binoculars carried by the other, and when Captain Declosis learned the facts he insisted upon it that the young Yankee lieutenant should take possession of his own property, making all sorts of apologies for having kept the fine glasses in constant use since they came into his possession through his relative, the hotel keeper in Havre.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CONCLUSION

AFTER a time they reached open ground again, and all of them were pleased to be rid of the sombre forest that had begun to get on their nerves.

It was plain to be seen that Pershing's First Army had been pushing forward with increasing energy since the time when Tom and his little detachment became lost in the forest. Already the advance was miles away, so that back where they now found themselves it was almost quiet, in so far as the roar of big guns was concerned.

Still, if one chose to take notice, it would be easy to hear positive evidence in the near distance that the boys in khaki were still pressing back the foe, wiping up his interminable machine-gun nests, and wherever they could strike a larger force charging it with a vim that would not be denied.

Of course there were bustling scenes all around them. Ambulances and loaded motor trucks filled every road, going this way and that. Gangs of men were busy repairing roads or laying wires. Squads of the recently wounded sat waiting for their turn to come to be taken to the hospitals, either near by, or at some more distant base.

And Salvation Army lassies were flitting in and out among these groups, carrying piles of their delicious crullers or doughnuts, a real American delicacy which went straight to the hearts of those boys, turning their thoughts in many cases to the homes so far away, where those held most dear were counting the days, and looking forward so eagerly for letters from over the wide sea. (See Note 10.)

The little French children were taken from the ambulance in which they had ridden with Mrs. Caslon and were taken in charge by one of the Red Cross workers. They were sent forward to Paris, where, it was later learned, a home was found for them in which they were well cared for.

Greatly to the delight of Mart, though he tried not to show it any more than he could help, they were taken to the same field hospital where he had taken the member of his patrol who had been wounded in that night adventure in No-Man's-Land.

Tom looked toward Mart as they were dismounting, and received an affirmative nod, which caused him to look particularly pleased.

"I certainly hope my sister is here still, Mart," the lieutenant said as they came together.

"But you don't think they'd be apt to send her back to Paris, do you?" demanded the other, in dismay. "Just when the Americans are getting into

their stride, too, and have need of every hospital nurse going!"

"That's true enough, and I think we'll find Lucille here," Tom assured him, with a little smile of understanding, for brothers need not be entirely blind on occasion. "Though of course they'll soon have to move this field establishment forward, because it has to keep up with the advance of our army to be useful. But get the folks together, and we'll try to surprise Lucille."

When Tom's sister, engaged with her manifold duties, heard a familiar voice pronounce her name she looked up joyfully. Imagine her utter amazement when she beheld that group standing close by, and surveying her with smiles.

"Oh, Tom!" she exclaimed as her brother took her in his arms. "How glad I am to see you again, and know you are safe! Every time a lieutenant has been brought in my heart would almost jump into my throat with fear that it might be you. And here is Mart, too, and—I can hardly believe my eyes—Mrs. Caslon and the boys, as well as the Bartletts! What miracle is this, to have you all drop in on me after these long years of separation?"

"I really don't wonder you can hardly recognize me, my dear," said the widow, after she had kissed the pretty Red Cross nurse repeatedly, to the envy of some of those who looked on. "Those Austri-

ans and Germans have almost starved us, what with their horrible black bread, and precious little of that in the bargain. But I am overjoyed to know it is all over, and that the Allies and the Americans are now chasing the Huns back to their own borders."

When Lucille noticed that several of the party needed attention she immediately commenced to busy herself, bent on showing that she had become an accomplished worker in caring for the wounded. Mart hung back until all the others had received attention, Harvey having been taken in charge by the head surgeon, at the particular request of his favourite nurse.

"And so you've been at it again, have you, Mart?" asked Lucille, when finally the modest sergeant consented to let her dress his injuries.

"Oh, yes; it's getting to be a regular habit with me, it seems," he admitted, and then quickly added: "But since it gives me a chance to have a nice little chat with an old friend like you, Lucille, why should I complain?"

Lucille blushed, and then smiled in return as she hastened to say:

"While I'm working, Mart, you must tell me something about your meeting with the Caslons and Bartletts, which I consider a most remarkable happening. She does look as if she had not had half enough to eat all this while; and Thomas too is very gaunt. He says he means to enlist immediately, so

as to get back a few blows to pay for all he has suffered."

Mart, nothing loath, proceeded to spin the yarn; and while he never failed to tell of the wonderful way in which his comrades fought off the German hosts who tried to either kill or capture them, Lucille could but note that Mart had nothing whatever to say concerning his own achievements.

"You choose to keep silent with regard to what share you had in all that glorious work, Mart," she plainly told him, raising a chiding finger at the same time. "But I mean to ask Tom about it. What's this he was saying about recovering those binoculars of his? Is that really true, and where did he run across them?"

"Oh! in the strangest way you could imagine," admitted Mart. "And so, you see, that dinner is going to be on me after all."

"Tell me all about it, because I've not nearly finished dressing your arm, and then there's that nasty cut on your head to be attended to before I let you off, Mart."

Apparently Mart was not at all averse to talking on that subject, for he continued to sit there for half an hour longer, chatting, until finally Tom came around and hurried him off.

"You'll have leave for some days, Sergeant Dorr," he said stiffly, as became a commissioned officer addressing a non-commissioned man, "until

your wounds are better, so you can join your company; but that's no reason you should monopolize the attention of the kind nurse here, who has so many duties to look after. Better come with the rest of us now, and drop in tomorrow so Sis here can give your hurts another dressing."

Mrs. Caslon had decided to go on to Paris at the very first opportunity, there to engage in such war work as she could find to do. Her heart was so filled with gratitude because of the preservation of her twin boys and her own life that she felt she could never do enough for those gallant fellows who had come to their relief when all seemed lost.

"I would work my fingers to the bone," she told Lucille, when saying good-bye, "to do something to relieve those boys who have given up their homes and come across the ocean to lay down their lives if need be for the precious cause of humanity. So I shall stay here, now that I am in France, and do all I can with my personal service and my money to relieve suffering."

Henry and Paul went with her, while Thomas and Frank stayed, meaning to find some way of getting into the service without going into a regular training camp. Paul was coming back as soon as possible, to join them; but Mrs. Caslon decided that she would require the services of Henry while she remained in Paris, where he could make himself just as useful.

And so having brought our young friends safely through their remarkable adventures on the fighting front with Pershing's army it is only left to gather a few more of the threads of the narrative, and tell what the prospects were for them in the near future.

Big Bill was made happy before two weeks passed by receiving notification that he might sew the chevrons of a full-fledged sergeant on his sleeve. Well had he earned the honour, and when the story of what he had done in saving Harvey's life, as also during the subsequent fighting, was made known to his mates in the company, there was not a more popular non-commissioned officer in the whole of that army than Big Bill Hicksley.

Everybody knew that Germany had shot her bolt, and was rapidly going downhill. The French and British were sweeping the Kaiser's best troops before them like chaff; and now that Pershing's boys had taken on their share of the fighting the end was in plain sight.

Thomas and Frank and Paul were eager to get in uniform before the fighting came to an end. They felt like substitutes waiting on the side line of the gridiron for the captain to call them to duty, meanwhile eating out their very hearts for envy of those who were in the tumult.

Tom managed to get in a good word for them that hastened matters, but at any rate it was not long before Thomas and Frank were driving ambulances

right up back of the fighting line; while Paul was given a chance to exploit his knowledge of first aid work by acting as an assistant to the surgeons in the field hospital where Lucille nursed.

There they were all doing their duty nobly, striving to hold up the high ambition of the American Government that had resolved to make every sacrifice, without hope of any recompense save that democracy, as embodied in the love of one man for his fellows, should not perish from the face of the earth. And there we may leave them, confident that Tom and his comrades, as well as Lucille, will not flinch from the path of duty, no matter what befalls them.

And as the last words of this story are being written great and glorious news is coming from across the sea, telling us that we have not made our sacrifices in vain; for the house of cards which the Kaiser erected in dreaming his ambitious plans for Mittel Europe and the world domination is surely toppling to a fall.

NOTES

Note 1. See Page 19.

Naturally when the country first went to war with Germany there had to be temporary camps arranged to receive the early volunteers who, with patriotic enthusiasm, rushed to enlist. Thousands of army tents were utilized, and proved very acceptable, since the weather continued to grow warmer as April turned into May, and summer came on. Work was immediately commenced, however, on an enormous number of trim low buildings, such as were to be found completed in scores of great cantonments during the fall of 1917; and other myriads were still in process of construction in the following spring all through the North, East, West and South. These buildings were thoroughly habitable, and could if necessary be heated with stoves in the wintry months. The healthy young fellows living in them, and doing their bit toward acquiring a soldier's theoretical and practical education, found little to complain about, it must be confessed. Never did any Government care for its sons as these newly fledged fighters were being looked after. The best of food, and an abundance of it; comfortable quarters, and plenty of warm blankets for a good night's sleep; thoroughly up-to-date, light-weight, easily cleaned aluminum mugs and platters for each and every man; all manner of healthy outdoor amusements allowed in proper season; and always something

going on at the Y. M. C. A. "huts," where libraries of books, games, writing material, magazines by the score, a piano, as well as a talking machine with many donated records — what more could be desired to render the camp life of a young soldier free from "carking care"? Many an old veteran of the Civil War, or even those who took part in the little affair with Spain, have laughed contemptuously to see how tenderly Uncle Sam cares for his boys in these latter days. All sorts of stories have gone the rounds comparing their fortunate condition with the grim lack of ordinary comforts endured by the Boys in Blue who followed Grant and Sherman; or it might be those in Grey, even worse off, who fought so valiantly under the Stars and Bars with Lee, Jackson and Longstreet. Nevertheless the records prove that the young patriots of this latter day have shown themselves to be just as brave as their forefathers were. It seems to be in the blood.

Note 2. See Page 43.

In the earlier days after the United States had declared that a state of war existed between this country and the Imperial Government of Germany, transports bearing the khaki-clad soldiers of the Republic across the ocean were in the habit of starting forth unaccompanied by any armed convoy. At some designated place several days' sail distant from the destination of the transports, usually one or two British destroyers would meet them and act as guardians through what was then recognized as the limited "barred zone,"

where the elusive submarine lurked waiting for its prey. As the war progressed, and Germany began to send some of her latest and most dangerous submersibles across on long voyages, even raiding our Atlantic coast waters, it became necessary to make a radical change in the shipment of our hundreds of thousands of young soldiers, so as to better insure their safety. Accordingly there were huge sailings of many vessels, with an armed convoy of our own warships, which saw them safely across to where perhaps another flotilla of British destroyers awaited their coming, ready to take up the task, and carry the expedition to its port. Sometimes this was a French harbour like Havre or Boulogne; and then again it might be English soil that the feet of the modern argonauts would first tread upon when disembarking after the long voyage. Many of the Americans were placed in temporary camps in England and Scotland, from which later on, when better trained in the arts of up-to-date warfare, they could start across the Channel headed for France — and action. At the time of writing there have been over two million soldiers sent over-seas, and with but two serious catastrophes. One vessel was sunk by a torpedo, with considerable loss of life, and another transport went down through collision in the midst of a storm off the coast of Scotland. This was also attended by numerous casualties. This wonderful record, never before equalled in history, stands to the credit of the naval forces of the sister nations, whose hands have thus been truly “stretched across the sea” as never before.

Note 3. See Page 56.

As the menace of submarine warfare became more pronounced, various successful methods of hunting the U-boat soon began to strike terror to the hearts of those rash sailors who had started out from their German base, filled with an ambitious intention to make a record of sinkings. Between the fleet destroyers and the hovering hydroplanes that sped above the surface of the ocean the closest intimacy existed. In the broad stretches of the North Sea a covey of these big aerial scouts would speed along, covering a wide stretch of watery expanse, each observer with his powerful glass watching keenly for signs of a lurking submarine. When he had made a lucky discovery, possibly locating a submerged enemy vessel that was waiting for a Norwegian or British steamer's smoke to appear on the horizon, seen by means of the useful periscope, that particular pilot would immediately summon destroyers to the spot, for they were always within reach, eager to be in at the death of the wary German fox. Suddenly an attack would be made from above and below. The seaplane, swooping down, would drop depth bombs over the spot where it had marked the submerged U-boat. If these in exploding so injured the enemy vessel that it had to come to the surface the guns of the waiting destroyer quickly finished the work of destruction. Seldom was there a case of surrender. Little mercy was shown the crew of such piratical boats as made a business of sneaking up on an unsuspecting passenger vessel and firing a torpedo into its side without the slightest warning, possibly

afterwards shelling the crew as they scrambled into the boats in the effort to get away before the doomed craft went down. Doubtless in this eternal warfare going on between the submarines and the destroyers splendid material for scores and scores of thrilling sea stories are to be found; and the records of the British and American navies will be greatly enriched by the official accounts of the tragic happenings of those thrilling days and nights on guard over the destiny of the overseas traffic.

Note 4. See Page 61.

Those who have had the good fortune to see something of the astonishing work the American Government has carried on in France say that nothing approaching it has ever been known in any part of the world. In the beginning, realizing that a gigantic task opened up before them, these harbour improvements have been undertaken on the most colossal scale imaginable. Men stand and stare and wonder as they have seen a new system of wonderful docks built almost like magic in a certain port that must at the present writing remain nameless, for military reasons. Alongside of these rows of monster storehouses have been raised, until it would seem as though they were capable of housing enough food for the universe. Not only this, but the harbour was deepened, and a railway line laid across the entire country connecting this main reservoir with that part of the distant fighting front taken over by Pershing's army. Thus trains heavily laden with munitions, food, and every known necessity could

be run direct to where they were most needed, without taxing the already hard-pressed French lines. Great American locomotives with their giant driving wheels made the French people stare as though they believed the magic wand of a genii had come to touch the land, and transform it into an undreamed-of condition. What worried many of the natives concerned the eventual outcome of this wonderful invasion. Surely the people who had poured out their countless millions of dollars to effect this marvellous change must expect to stay for ever; and some of them even feared powerful America secretly intended to hold poor bleeding France in bondage until all these vast improvements had been paid for dollar by dollar. Judge of their amazement and delight when they were notified by the American Government that these improvements were intended to be a simple tribute from the American people to those of brave bleeding France, a simple token of the appreciation and affection in which they held the descendants of La Fayette. Not one stone or building would come down when peace was declared, but all must be handed over to the owners of the soil as a memento of that stimulating association of kindred free souls.

Note 5. See Page 84.

It was on October 23rd, 1917, that the first American shot of the war was fired on the soil of Europe. During the next thirty days the American infantry in line at no time exceeded 4000, for the First Division entered the trenches for training in a quiet sector of

the Lorraine front in three successive instalments of three battalions each, and were changed after a ten day experience. Their early fights were in company with the French, and though deemed fierce at the time, have since been looked back upon with smiles by "veterans," and denominated "playing at war." Since that time the number of men sent overseas increased in a year until it reached the magnificent total of two million in all, with more constantly coming from the vast training camps in America, an almost incessant flow. The battles during the summer of 1918 at Soissons and St. Mihiel tested the calibre of these young Americans to the utmost. Veteran British and French officers watched the result with more or less anxiety. But they came through with a glorious record for valour and intrepidity. Their rushes were like the hurricane. Many Germans declared they "fought like wild men" when in action; and could hardly believe the care-free laughing men they saw afterwards were the same from whom they had fled in alarm. Many of those who were in at the start were still wearing their old uniforms on the following October, a bit worn it is true, but still neat; and with the sleeves decorated with tarnished gold stripes which meant service and wounds. It was the First Division that formed the "spearhead" of Foch at Soissons, where they attained every objective that had been entrusted to their charge and won imperishable glory. It cannot be doubted but that it was the splendid work done by these boys in khaki on top of all the wonderful fighting by the Allies that had gone before, and the realiza-

tion that they were only the forerunners of a limitless host on the way, that broke up the plans of the Kaiser's leader Ludendorff, and eventually brought about the cry for an armistice.

Note 6. See Page 87.

It has always been something of a mystery to most persons why our Government delayed so long declaring that a state of war existed with Austria-Hungary. Doubtless there were sufficiently good reasons for hesitating to do this; but in the end they had to give way before the pressure exerted by Congress, and public opinion. Besides, the real determining factors were along military and naval lines. Germany was calling upon her ally to send a number of army corps to the western front to fight alongside her divisions; and it would be a strange thing if United States soldiers found themselves facing those of a country with which their Government was still supposed to be at peace. Then again submarines operating in the Mediterranean, though doubtless manufactured in Germany and manned by German crews, carried the Austrian flag and were committing every kind of ruthless assault on shipping wherever found, both neutral and that of the Allies. American vessels had been attacked without warning, and sunk, with a consequent loss of precious lives; and this sort of thing could be endured no longer. Consequently it was finally announced that the Austrian would be reckoned with the same as the German. And later on when the United States troops started fighting in earnest at Château Thierry they did actually

run up against an Austrian division, taking many prisoners from the same. As to Germany's other guilty confederates, Turkey and Bulgaria, war was never declared on those countries by America, much to the burning regret of many who would have liked to see the whole four hostile countries bunched together and treated to the same drastic medicine that Foch had in store for the Kaiser's armies. Doubtless Mrs. Caslon and her two boys were detained as suspicious characters simply because it was feared they had learned many truths about the weakness of the Hapsburg dynasty while detained in Austria, which it might be deemed hardly politic to allow them to carry out of the country.

Note 7. See Page 122.

What Mart told his cousin concerning a monster gun with which the Germans amused themselves in sending shells into the environs of Paris more than sixty-five miles distant was absolutely true, wonderful though such a thing might seem. For a time it was impossible to understand where the shells came from, and all manner of extravagant theories developed in explanation of the seeming miracle. Some even declared there was nothing remarkable about it, but that in some way the enemy had succeeded in getting a large Krupp gun past the French front, and from some lonely wood about twenty miles outside Paris daily fired a few rounds simply to mystify the Parisians. They possibly believed they could frighten the people of Paris so badly that they would even flee from their

homes. The contrary proved to be true, for after a while this daily bombardment became an event to be anticipated; so that crowds would come forth and rush to see where an explosion had taken place. Later on in the advance of the French and Americans at Soissons the site of this amazing gun was discovered. It had a railway track all to itself, and must have measured scores of feet in length. The Germans really owed it to their allies, the Austrians, it afterwards came out. The projectile was, so competent authorities agreed, so fashioned that several successive charges were exploded while it was in flight, thus accelerating its speed, and making it possible to cover several times the distance that an ordinary shell could go. It was also fired at such a high angle that the power of resistance offered by the atmosphere proved to be exceedingly slight as compared with the density of regions closer to the earth. Outside of striking a church filled with worshippers on a feast day, and killing many of the poor women, this gun did comparatively very little actual damage. It very soon came to be looked upon merely as a freak affair, and of little service. Nevertheless its record stands far beyond anything similar ever attained, and will serve to show what amazing results can be reached through the application of a knowledge of science, even in warfare.

Note 8. See Page 188.

The account of the adventures that came to Lieutenant Maillard, Sergeant Dorr, and many privates belonging to the battalion of Americans that went over

the top on that day in September is founded on a true historical happening of a similar nature. There was a Lost Battalion in that furious engagement, serving under Major Charles W. Whittlesley, that, becoming confused while in the depths of the great Argonne Forest, fought desperately day and night with numerous foes, and when almost exhausted and starved, as well as out of ammunition, still stubbornly refused to surrender. They were outnumbered ten to one, had lost many of their number, and the Germans were creeping closer and closer, with their machine-guns working constantly. The answer the gallant major sent back when the demand for surrender came, might not be considered as couched in very elegant language, but it was forceful enough, and conveyed the unalterable determination of him and his command to see a certain warm place freeze over before they would give up. They were in desperate straits when a regiment of Pershing's infantry, pushing on through the vast wood, heard sounds of firing, and loud defiant Yankee yells. Attracted by this commotion they changed the course of their advance, and arrived just in time to see their valiant comrades hurl back what was about the twenty-fifth attack. The discouraged Germans considered it high time to be going when they saw that reinforcements had arrived. They had tested the calibre of the Yankees, and apparently found it not at all to their liking. Consequently some of the things that are described as happening to our young heroes actually came about in real life, and the account only errs in not being one half as thrilling as the genuine occur-

rence must have been. But words are weak at best to describe such events, and those who participated in the adventure seem to be exceedingly modest; so that an admiring world may never be treated to a graphic account of the "Lost Battalion."

Note 9. See Page 246.

During the last great retreat of the vast German army, from the Meuse to the sea, as the main body of troops made their way back toward the border line there were many fierce battles fought with the eager oncoming forces of the French, British and Americans. Never once was the issue in doubt. Everywhere, now slowly, and again with great speed, the stubborn soldiers of the baffled Kaiser were compelled to give way. Often they had to destroy vast accumulations of stores and munitions, not having sufficient time to remove them. And besides this they made it a general practice to ruin the country before they left, so as to make most of it a howling wilderness. Not even one stone was left on another in many a poor French village. To delay the pursuit they had one particular play, which was to employ the tens of thousands of machine-guns which their wonderful factories had kept turning out for their use. Men armed with these terrible weapons of destruction would be left behind in sheaves, each sworn to hold out to the death, and do all the execution possible before the end came. The Allies had numerous ways of getting the better of these isolated nests of guns. As a rule, instead of trying to advance straight ahead they would pass on either side,

and then send men to cut down the gunners from the rear. If a tank were at hand it would be called upon to roll directly over the sunken nest, and demolish both gun and gunners. Often these German snipers would be hidden in the heart of a dense tree, their presence all unsuspected until the murderous tattoo of the weapon began to sound like an immense locust or a deadly rattlesnake. As a rule little mercy was shown these machine-gun men, simply because their work was akin to that of the submarine. To take an enemy by surprise and pour a deadly fire upon him unawares, seemed to suit the ambition of the average Hun. Though the work was known to be extra hazardous there was no lack of applicants for the job.

Note 10. See Page 295.

Probably the memory that will remain longest in the minds of all those hundreds of thousands of young American soldiers who campaigned in France will be in connection with the wonderful work of the Y. M. C. A. secretaries and those who laboured with them. Nothing anything like it was ever attempted before. Day and night, in all sorts of weather, often under a deluge of bursting shells, those devoted workers never allowed themselves to tire of well doing. In the "huts" and canteens they laboured, trying to bring a touch of home life to those so far distant from all their kin. In a thousand ways they proved themselves invaluable helpers, men and women all. War lost much of its grim horror when just back of the lines the resting battalions could enjoy good music; see motion

picture shows that made them forget the fearful tragedies of the day before ; write letters home ; get a smoke that gave them fresh spirit, and in countless ways benefit from the devotion of these tireless workers. There were others, too, who materially assisted in looking after the fighting man's comfort, chief among whom may be mentioned the Salvation Army lassies who thought nothing of taking chances with shell fire in their desire to meet the men coming back from the trenches, wet and fagged, to give them a cup of coffee and one of those wonderful doughnuts hot from the pan, just the kind "mother used to make." Never will they be forgotten. When some of those same boys are grey with years they will still delight to tell of the sunny-faced cheery girls who ministered so devotedly to their wants, with no thought of any return save a look, and the eagerness with which their wares were devoured. Nor were the agencies unloosed by the Y. M. C. A. solely confined to American boys. When the poor French and Belgian peasants were unearthed in some of the towns and villages redeemed from Boche rule they were taken in charge by these Good Samaritans, their wounds dressed, and the children bountifully fed — the first time in years, with most of those poor souls. And never can France, Italy, Serbia or Belgium cease to be grateful to the Y. M. C. A. and the Red Cross for all that was done for them in their day of crying need.

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